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Absent societies: Contouring urban citizenship in postcolonial Chennai

Pushpa Gowri Arabindoo

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Declaration

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Abstract

This thesis contours the dynamics of urban citizenship in a postcolonial city, against a cautionary note that such cities are undergoing a unique metamorphosis triggered by the national pursuit of neo-liberalisation policies. In an existing condition of sharply divided geographies, postcolonial cities, by becoming key portals to the flows of trans-nationalised capital, are being subject to a spatial reordering resulting in heightened forms of socio-economic inequality. Amidst a reduced terrain of common allegiances, neo-liberal citizenship rejects the ideal of commensurable citizens and is more conducive to a bourgeois ethic of right, which now defines the cityscape. In this regard, the research examines the construction of urban citizenship by Indian middle class homeowners in the southern metropolis of Chennai. Residents were interviewed on two main issues – their use of residents’ associations as a means of collective action and their operation in the realm of civil society, and their adoption of a ‘pristine’ vocabulary in the re-imagination of the public spaces, mainly the beaches, in the city. Their responses are analysed against the state’s pursuit of a new form of urban developmentalism to establish how they complement each other. This reveals that – oscillating between socio-political absenteeism and active citizenship – the political engagement of the Indian middle class is paradoxically through a process of ‘depoliticisation’. While there is concern about the middle class’s earlier practiced politics of indifference morphing into a politics of intolerance, this research finds that their bourgeois discourse of citizenship, hinging together the notion of propriety and property, comes across as weak and flawed, one that is exclusive but easily contested.

Acknowledgements

In summer 2002, after a year at the Cities Programme in LSE, I transferred to the Geography Department, bringing with me vague ideas of a ‘barely there’ research proposal. As I met my supervisor, Gareth Jones, for the first time, I am sure he thought ‘this is going to be a difficult one’. And it would have been, were it not for his excellent supervision and critical role in shaping this thesis. He is that rare breed of supervisor who is also your friend, philosopher and guide. Thank you, Gareth, for going that extra mile.

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Members of the Indian middle class when not complaining about politics are often rueing about not having enough time. And yet, they graciously accepted my request for interviews, and I am indebted to the hundred-odd residents for accommodating me in their busy schedules. Conversing with them helped me see Chennai in a different light—the city I grew up in, the city I love, and the city that I am now slowly beginning to understand.

As a part-time PhD student, I am indebted to my employers, Peter Ching and John Henry who, for several years, put up with my erratic work schedule, while I constantly moved between continents in this crazy pursuit.

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Acronyms

ADMK	Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
CAG	Citizen Consumer and Civic Action Group
CMA	Chennai Metropolitan Area
CMDA	Chennai Metropolitan Development Corporation
CSR	Citizen for Safe Roads
CTTF	Chennai Traffic Task Force
CUA	Chennai Urban Agglomeration
DMK	Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
ECBWA	East Coast Beach Walkers Association
ECR	East Coast Road
EGM	Extraordinary General Meeting
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
INTACH	Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage
MMDA	Madras Metropolitan Development Corporation
MRTS	Mass Rapid Transit System
NCAER	National Council of Applied Economic Research
NRI	Non Resident Indian
NSSO	National Sample Survey Organisation
NEP	New Economic Policy
NMC	New Middle Class
OBC	Other Backward Classes
OMR	Old Mahabalipuram Road
QMC	Queen Mary's College
TNHB	Tamil Nadu Housing Board
TNPCB	Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board
TNSCB	Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board
TNRDC	Tamil Nadu Road Development Corporation
ULCRA	Urban Land Ceiling and Regulation Act

Clarifications

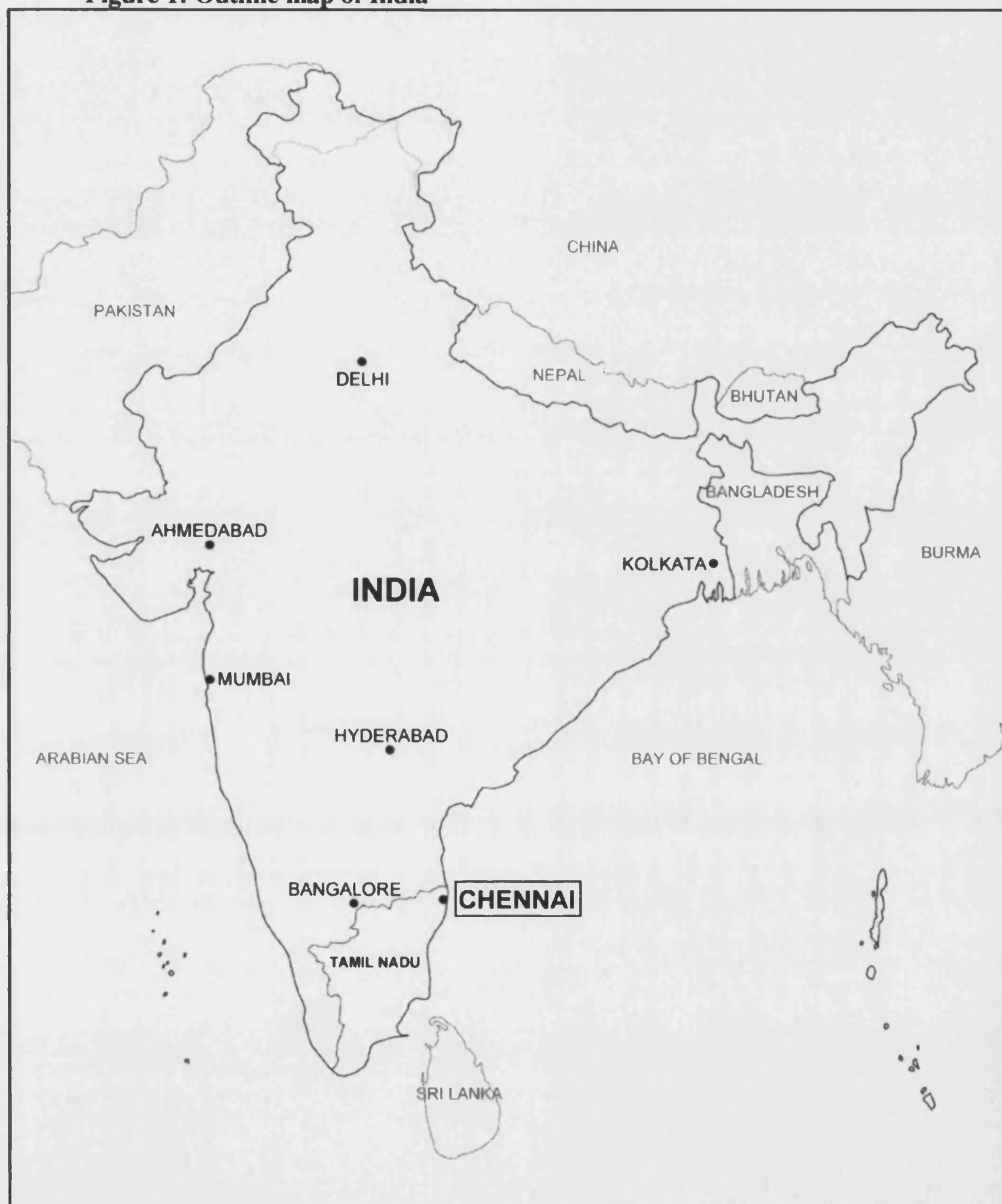
Madras was renamed as Chennai in 1996. In this thesis, pre-1996 references retain Madras while Chennai is used in the post-1996 context. The same applies for Bombay/Mumbai (pre- and post-1995), and Calcutta/Kolkata (pre- and post-1999).

One crore is ten million Indian rupees, and one lakh is one hundred thousand Indian rupees. One US dollar is roughly equivalent to forty Indian rupees.

Most interviews were conducted in English, with a few in Tamil, which were directly transcribed and translated into English by the author.

All illustrations except when cited are by the author. Maps have been drawn using the Eicher city map for Chennai as a base source. Their permission is gratefully acknowledged.

Figure 1: Outline map of India



Note: The external boundaries of India are neither correct nor authenticated;
The territorial waters of India extend into the sea to a distance of 12 nautical
miles measured from the appropriate baseline; based on Survey of India

1

Introduction: 'the hour of the citizen'

Our century is the only one in which historic dates have taken such a voracious grip on every single person's life. (Kundera 2003: 11)

Milan Kundera in his novel *Ignorance* reiterates at several instances that important dates cut deep gashes into the twentieth century. His narrative is interspersed with references to dates and events as historic markers, with 1989 standing tall as he weaves the nostalgic reverie of Czech émigrés preparing to revisit their country after the fall of communism. But in his eagerness to present the great episodic events of history, he hastily claims 1989's significance exclusively for European history, declaring that 'Europe's Communism burned out exactly two hundred years after the French revolution took fire....that was a coincidence loaded with meaning. But with what meaning? What name could be given to the triumphal arch spanning those two majestic dates? *The Arch of the Two Greatest European Revolutions? Or The Arch Connecting the Greatest Revolution with the Final Restoration?*' (2003: 29-30, emphasis original).

Scholars have relished with indulgence the magical alignment of 1989 (to a degree of rare mathematical precision) with the French Revolution of 1789 drawing obvious correlations between the two events. But it needs to be clarified that these dates have global relevance beyond European boundaries. Kumar (2001: ix) insists that 'the 1989 revolutions were about much more than the fate of certain regimes in East Central Europe. They opened up questions

about a range of issues that concerned Europe, the West, and the wider world'. According to him, the events of 1989 have a "world-historical" significance that brought to an end the existence of a bipolar world. This removed at least in principle, the category of the "Third World," as 'a theoretical convenience invented for the purpose of describing societies dependent on one or another of the world superpowers' (ibid.: 240).¹

In emphasising its global influence, it should also be noted that the revolutionary events of 1989 that stretched across the globe between Eastern Europe and China implied more than the evident repudiation of communism. While it is tempting to paint a revisionist historiography of the 1989 pro-democracy movements as the end of communism, in reality they signify more than the end of conflict between the warring ideologies of capitalism and socialism. Instead, they represent a greater rupture in international history, in the sense that, besides being the greatest of all revolutions marking the twentieth century as the age of revolutions (Bauman 1994), they have also brought about ideological reformations whereby the notion of nation-state and citizenship, society and its civil associations, and the model of economic pursuit have been completely revised. To a degree, perhaps 1989 brought to a close the conflict of ideals that began in 1789 with the French Revolution. It was in this context that Fukuyama (1989) proclaimed his highly criticised 'end of history' as the events of 1989 demonstrated the end of contending ideas about the fundamental principles of government and society and unleashed instead an unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism.

1989 thus proved to be a remarkable pivot point that signified sweeping political, economic and social transformations. With the fracture of nine political nations in East Central Europe into twenty-eight states, the modern notion of national citizenship was challenged, prompting Dahrendorf (1990) to declare 1989 as the 'hour of the citizen'. While Roeder (1999: 745) argued that

¹ Kumar (2001) nevertheless concedes that distinctions between "north" and "south" still persist wherein inequalities between rich and poor nations are, if anything, greater than in the past, but within the context of a unified world order.

the 'outcome is increasingly homogeneous countries as the borders of nations and states come to correspond more closely', Verdery (1998) observed that the new citizenship that arose post-1989 was a highly questionable one, often based on ethnonationalism and an intense struggle between the majority and minority ethnic groups. Consequently new ways of thinking about citizenship multiplied producing alternative notions, variously described as flexible citizenship (Ong 1999), differentiated citizenship (Young 1990; Kymlicka 1995), multicultural citizenship (Kymlicka 1995, 1998) and cosmopolitan citizenship (Linklater 2002).

At the same time, 1989 catalysed transitions to market economies around the world creating conditions of possible contradiction between political and economic justice.² Replacing a centralised command state-administered system of production and distribution with a bewildering variety of market and transitional forms, the economic revolution of 1989 flagged 'the global victory of some version of neoliberalism' (Appadurai 2002: 21). And above all, socially, 1989 marked the return of the classic bourgeois revolution spearheaded by intellectuals, students and bourgeois residents in towns and cities across the world. Essentially urban and bourgeois in character, riding heavily on the revival of the language of civil society and by corollary an independent (urban) bourgeoisie, the revolutions of 1989 gave credence to Barrington Moore's (1966) "no bourgeois, no democracy" hypothesis. Rather than the transformation of bourgeois politics by proletarian will that the Marxists eagerly hailed after the 1917 revolution, the bourgeois domination of 1989 reflected sternly on the claims of 1917 and its illusion of communism (Kumar 2001).

While citizenship has become a topic of greatly heightened interest in the 1990s social science, any debate on its new course needs to consider it in

² This process has been abetted by the interventions of international institutions like World Bank and the IMF who, since 1989, with the emergence of new democracies, have made transition to market economies a benchmark condition for granting loans to the newly created polities.

the fuller context of political, economic and social transformations, especially against the rise of neoliberalism and a bourgeois society. No where are the effects of this wholesome transformation more apparent than in India. Here, in 1989, a metamorphosis of Indian politics, its society and economy, was triggered, albeit in a less revolutionary manner and through the forum of democratic elections. This determined a direction of flow that remains relevant to date and constitutes the subject of this thesis.

1.1 1989 in India: electing to change

In November 1989, the ninth parliamentary election was held in India. At first there seemed nothing spectacular about this routine event. Gupta (1989) remarked that this would be a wave-less election, while Kohli (1990: 4-5) felt that 'it was probably the first "usual" election since 1967 in that it was not conducted in the shadow of mood-generating euphorias or crises'. But when it became obvious that the ruling Congress Party was being voted out of power, it was clear that the results indicated more than an anti-incumbency shift. This was the second time that the Congress Party lost the elections, and there was a compelling temptation to compare this outcome with that of 1977 when it was defeated by a united opposition party.

But 1989 was more than a repeat performance of the 1977 elections.³ As Rudolph and Rudolph (1987) have argued, 1977 was in no way a critical election, with its outcome being more of a protest vote against Congress's emergency regime and less of a victory for the opposition party's ideology. On the contrary, the general elections of 1989 proved to be a watershed ushering in a new phase of politics, wherein the Indian nation-state has been critically challenged. Its political operating machine, since 1989, has been debilitated by a continuous stream of unstable coalition governments, the growing dominance

³ In 1977, opposition parties united to form the Janata Party and successfully contested the general election. Earlier in 1967, a 'Grand Alliance' had similarly been formed between the various opposition parties and had come narrowly close to toppling the Congress-dominance at the Centre.

of regionalism in the Centre, and above all, the corruption of nationalism as it transforms from a postcolonial nationalistic pride to a discredited and repugnant 'ethnonationalism'.

1.1.1 The new rule of coalitions and regionalism

The irony of the National Front (NF) Government taking oath in December 1989 was remarkable, as the government was formed with outside support from two improbable allies: the right-wing Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the communists on the left. Even though the mandate against Congress in the 1989 elections was obvious, there was no clear mandate for a single party, raising the prospect of a formal coalition for the first time. As the electorate denied a parliamentary majority to any one political party, it marked the shift away from majority to minority rule, and the dawn of coalition politics (Andersen 1990). It also represented a departure wherein each of the five national elections since 1989 has produced either a minority government or a coalition involving alliances amongst ideologically diverse parties in a farcical manner, based on short-term gains, and often operating on an issue by issue basis. Singh (1992a: 1) presciently viewed the 1989 elections sceptically, as 'this new phase has failed to provide a framework for stable and effective governance in a society marked by rapid and explosive changes', resulting in the dilemma 'to govern or not to govern' (Singh 1992b: 303).

Coalition governments are the result not just of the lack of a single clear choice of the electorate, but a fragmented set of choices, engendered by the rise of regionalism, a phenomenon drawn to the national mainstream post-1989. Nigam (1996) notices a change in the character of many of the "national" formations as erstwhile "national" parties went through mutations, splits and reincarnations, and emerged as new regional parties, remaining "national" only in form while embodying regional aspirations. The new alliances challenged the prevalent notion that the national space was something different and discrete from regional or state-level politics, and that national concerns could only be represented by the so-called national parties (Figure 2).

Figure 2: RK Laxman, *The Times of India* on the eve of 1989 elections⁴



Source: Laxman (2005: 162); This cartoon illustrates the crowding of the national platform with national-level leaders jostling for space with regional politicians.

Regional parties have shown consistent growth in the national electoral performance. This has allowed them to seek a greater share in the central power and a more prominent position in the nation. But this renegotiation of the pan-Indian identity through the “locality” has proved to be a problematic exercise (Nigam 1996). Most of the regional parties have grown out of the will of handful of people commanding only a local base, confined to a linguistic region and rarely organised across state boundaries (Meyer 1989), raising questions of vulnerability and credibility. Since 1989, with the inevitability of coalition politics, regional parties have assumed a larger role whereby parties

⁴ RK Laxman is a cartoonist at *The Times of India* (since 1947), whose front-page pocket column series ‘You said it’ (since 1961) is a popular commentary on the state of things in India, with the *common man* as the observer conveying a powerful sense of middle class anguish (Deshpande 2003). His cartoons are a sharp reflection on national policies affecting the quotidian concerns of the common man. They are used in this thesis to illustrate popular understanding of issues discussed in various sections.

confined to single states hold the key to the formation of central governments. Jenkins (2000: 50) is pessimistic about this trend reflecting as to whether the 'electoral process produced not a national verdict, but an aggregation of local verdicts'. He views regionalisation of the Centre not as a celebration of India's federal system, since regional parties are prevailingly loyal to their own 'local' interests, and are incapable of building a national manifesto required of a central government.⁵

1.1.2 Nationalism rears its ugly head

Beyond the obvious trend of coalition politics and the penetrating influence of regionalism at the Centre, 1989 most significantly marked the death of a particular kind of national politics, and the commencement of a different variety which seriously challenges analysis of the Indian nation-state and the Indian citizen. The emerging version of national politics represents as well the decline of a particular type of politics woven around a highly linear idea of what constitutes the "Indian nation" (Nigam 1996). The credibility of the Congress Party was based on its claim to carry the mantle of the national movement, and in the post-independence period the party embodied a certain shared imagination of the nation. But the unsuccessful Congress campaign of 1989 brought to the forefront 'manifestations of a much more complex dynamic that lies at the heart of Indian politics—one that revolves around the notions of nationhood and the serious contestations therein' (Nigam 1996: 1158).

The first ruptures in the nationalist discourse appeared in the 1980s when myriad "fragmented" identities challenged the carefully constructed pan-Indian identity propelled by a centrist state (Nigam 1996). 1989 proved to be a year of the discursive break generating a new imagination of the nation, modelled by the forces of an anti-secular, pro-religious discourse that replaced

⁵ This discussion becomes more relevant in *Chapter Four* where the focus shifts to the particular regionalism of Tamil Nadu as practiced by its successive Dravidian governments.

the secular-nationalist one. In the absence of a positive verdict in favour of any single party, the one party that registered a significant gain was the right-wing Hindu fundamentalist BJP which won 85 seats (nearly twice that of the left parties who won 44). Buoyed by its performance, it is the BJP more than the socialist Janata Dal or the left parties that took advantage of this discursive break in the imagination of the Indian nation, laying the foundation for a BJP-type redefinition of the nationhood. Its attempt to present itself as a national alternative to the Congress Party has been successful with its percentage of vote share increasing from 11 percent in 1989 to 25 percent in the 1990s (while that of the communist parties stagnates around 10 percent), and its emergence as the party with the largest number of seats in three national elections (1996, 1998 and 1999).⁶

Neither a rank newcomer nor an outsider to Indian politics, the BJP is a contemporary version of the political ideology of Hindu nationalism dating back to the late nineteenth century.⁷ The party's remarkable performance in the 1989 elections revealed a heightened consciousness of community, caste and ethnic identities based on *Hindutva* amongst the electorate.⁸ Its manifesto highlights anti-secular religious issues including the conflicting site of Ram Janambhoomi-Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, the need for a uniform civil code, the abolition of Article 370 in Kashmir, and the replacement of a Minorities Commission by the Human Rights Commission.⁹ Also problematic is their

⁶ On all three occasions the BJP formed the government with varying degrees of success. In 1996, the effort was short-lived as the BJP-government lasted for only thirteen days. In 1998, it survived for about a year and it was only in 1999 that it finally found its footing (and right alliance partners), completing a full term in office. Even though the BJP lost the 2004 national elections to a Congress-led coalition, its presence at the national level remains significant with 185 MPs representing its alliance.

⁷ Its predecessors include the Hindu Mahasabha and the Bharatiya Jana Sangh. For a good analysis of the BJP and its style of nation-hood, see Hansen and Jaffrelot (1998).

⁸ Deshpande (2000) distinguishes *Hindutva* from the more generic Hinduism, where the latter merely referred to the followers of the Hindu religion while *Hindutva* used the notion of a sacred geography to carve a larger imagined nation-space. This is a distinction made in the 1920s by the Hindu nationalist leader VD Savarkar who is now considered as the forefather of the BJP-style of politics.

⁹ The Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid shrine in the ancient twin cities of Ayodhya and Faizabad is claimed by the Muslims as the mosque built by the first Mughal emperor Babur in the 16th century and by the Hindus as the birthplace of Hindu god Rama. In December 1992, Hindu militant activists known as the *kar sevaks* razed the mosque to ground with the support

commitment to a process of cultural homogenisation forging ‘one nation, one people, one culture’ through a revised historical imagination at odds with the ‘Indianness’ defined by the post-independence secular-nationalist elite led by Nehru (Khilnani 1997). Arguing for a Hindu nation, the BJP mobilised to extend the ideas of Hindu nationalism, transforming key items in their manifesto into potent symbols of a Hindu majority threatened by the Muslim “Other” (Corbridge and Harriss 2001). The leaders of the BJP successfully presented their argument that the complicity of Nehru’s secularism with a hegemonic nationalist project has proved to be historically unsustainable and ethically unjust, since the Nehruvian secular political ideology speaks only to an abstract set of people, and can therefore be oppressive (Nigam 1996).

Since the 1980s and throughout the 1990s, opportunities for reviving Hindu nationalism have been ripe partly due to historical fatigue and partly due to the compulsions of populist politics redefining democracy as majority rule. As Hindu right politicians tried to reverse the spatial logic of the nation-space, rather than rejecting the Nehruvian structure of the secular and modern state, they used it to their advantage. Dubbing their secular adversaries, particularly the Nehruvian Congressmen, as ‘pseudo-secularists’, the Hindu right claims that it is not against the idea of the secular state. Instead, it mobilises the will of the interventionist modernising state ‘to erase the presence of religious or ethnic particularisms from the domain of law or public life, and to supply, in the name of “national culture”, a homogenized content to the notion of citizenship’ (Chatterjee 1997a: 230-31; Figure 3). This is a sort of payback for the BJP whose Hindu nationalism was one of several nationalistic responses to

of the BJP. The uniform civil code is intended to replace the existing personal laws that protect the Muslims where shariat laws stand above secular laws. Article 370 of the constitution gives special rights to the state of Jammu and Kashmir, the only Muslim-majority state in India prohibiting people from other parts of the country from buying land, starting a business, settling down, or even taking up a government job in the state. The BJP argues that Indian security is seriously compromised by giving such a special status to a Muslim-majority state bordering a hostile Islamic republic (Pakistan). It also maintains that the Minorities Commission entertains complaints of discrimination only from minority sections and that a Human Rights Commission is needed for justice to all sections of society.

colonialism, but was subsumed by the Nehruvian line of secular thinking (Khilnani 1997).

Figure 3: RK Laxman, *The Times of India*, BJP and secularism



Source: Laxman (2005: 276)

Undermining the Indian citizen

According to Nehru, the modern secular state was the only way of offering the legal guarantee of equal citizenship regardless of religion, caste, creed or other social attributes. By developing a citizenship defined by universalist, civic rather than ethnic criteria, Nehru envisioned a spatial inclusivity which eventually proved vulnerable to the axis of exclusivity evident in the Hindutva project (Deshpande 1998). Chatterjee (1998) once commented that the attempt to create a sovereign domain in which the people of India all became citizens of the republic was only a constitutional fiction. Though this retort emerged from a different context, it carries particular value considering the ease with which Hindu nationalism, embracing the armoury of the modern state, has been

able to associate an ethnically homogenous community with a singular Indian citizenship. Viewed in this light, when the BJP proposed a National Register of Citizens, it appears as an attempt against those not conforming to its version of “national culture”. This is reflected in at least two efforts made by the BJP to redefine the Indian citizen. Most specifically, through a reconciliatory process of internalised exclusion and externalised inclusion, it initiated the re-imagination of a national citizenship of the majority: the expulsion of Bangladeshi and Bengali-speaking Muslims as alleged illegal immigrants and non-Indian citizens, while providing at the same time dual citizenship for a large non-resident predominantly Hindu Indian community abroad.¹⁰

By conflating civic citizenship with an ethnicised national identity, the BJP has erected a problematic understanding of national citizenship. But the crisis surrounding the legibility and credibility of an Indian nation-state is a long-standing one. Khilnani (1997) notes that the fundamental matter of India’s selfhood has never really been settled since the multitude of religions, castes and languages cut across myriad ethnic and cultural communities, creating a discordant material – not the stuff from which nation states are fashioned. Since no common unity could be reconciled within a modern state, Indian identity has always revolved around pluralist compromises, wherein one cannot be only Indian and nothing else. The crisis of the Indian nation-state can be traced to the early ambiguities of Indian nationalism, which, through the gradual recession of the open democratic process has given way to the national chauvinist and communal appeals that are being mounted from the very centre of the state (Kaviraj 1995).

¹⁰ The BJP’s efforts to weed out illegal Bangladeshi immigrants including the deportation of several Bengali-speaking Indian Muslims has been described by Ramachandran (2005) as an exercise in “capricious citizenship”, producing a fundamentally warped conception of citizenship (Sen 2003). At the same time, in 2002, the BJP decided to grant dual citizenship to Indians living abroad, including prosperous western countries but excluding Pakistan and Bangladesh. While such a move was economically motivated, it also has a strong dimension of ‘ethnonationalism’ attached to it, as the BJP sought to distinguish an ethnic rather than a territorial understanding of the Indian people, thereby revealing the ill-effects of “long-distance nationalism” (Anderson 1998).

1.2 Crisis of citizenship, postcolonial and otherwise

Pessimism about the feasibility of nationalism, nation-state and its offer of citizenship is not peculiar to India alone. Since the 1960s, as many postcolonial societies became independent nation-states, much attention has been given to monitoring this process as the 'postcolonies' tried to negotiate an uneasy alliance with the nation-state (Badie 2000; Bayart 1993; Geertz 1963; Chatterjee 1986). Many Third World countries proved to still be pre-modern polities merely running a modern economy (Hawthorne 1991), with pre-independence nationalism incapable of evolving from a formula of protest to a formula of governmental mobilisation. Instead, such nation-states showed that beyond liberation, they had no programme, only a vague commitment to continue a history (Walzer 1998). Moreover, given the pluralities of concomitant identities in postcolonial societies, the self-determination of the people has been confused with the self-determination of the nation, resulting in a nation that is at odds with itself.

While such concerns are specific to postcolonial societies, they are situated within the larger universal crisis of the nation-state and its national citizenship which also pervades the western world. Appadurai (1996: 19, 1993) in noting the rather flimsy nature of the hyphenated condition between the nation and the state drew attention to the fact that 'the nation-state, as a complex modern political form, is on its last legs', where 'the right-hand side of the hyphen can barely contain the unruliness of the left-hand side' (1996: 172). In this context, the changing nature of citizenship in the context of the 1989 events and as observed at the beginning of this chapter can be viewed as a process where the state was unhinged from the nation. As a result, modern citizenship born of the nation-state was endangered and thrown into a crisis. These events brought to the front the uneasy relation between citizenship and national identity: a semantic connection that has been loosened on account of the disintegration of the classic form of the nation-state (Habermas 1994). Citizenship scholars have thus speculated on newer forms where alternatives

could be found in the context of the decline rather than the foundation of nation-states (Andrews 1994).

1.3 Alternative ‘spaces’ of citizenship

Arguments against the continued applicability of national citizenship have in most instances prevailed mainly by demonstrating the spatial inappropriateness of its current form, i.e. nation-space as a robust crucible for carrying the mantle of citizenship. As the need to inscribe citizenship and newer forms of “imagined communities” in space remains intact, attempts to redefine and re-imagine citizenship have at a broad-brush level assumed two polarised positions of spatial re-conceptualisation. This involves enlarging post-nationally at the global level, or reducing sub-nationally to the local scale. Sceptics argue that the inappropriateness of the nation-state triggers inefficiency and passivity as where a national fitting is ‘too small for global forces and too big for personal concerns’ (Castells 1997: 273). Even Anderson (1995: 66) amidst his sympathetic stand on the exaggerated death of nation-states cannot help observing that ‘this key institution of modern society is apparently being squeezed by a combined pincer movement “from above” and “from below”’, or what Beauregard and Bounds (2000) described as an assault by globalisation from without and identity-based movements from within.¹¹ But, nonetheless, critics have sought a spatial alternative to national citizenship based on either of these simultaneously undermining globalising and localising pressures.

Scholars pursuing the possibility of mapping an alternative citizenship on a global terrain emphasise that there is neither novelty nor radicalism in

¹¹ Arguments that global restructuring triggers the demise of the nation-state are increasingly replaced by assertions that insertion of the global is still within the limits of the national, and often requires a strong nation-state (as seen in the examples of East Asian countries). Sassen (1991, 1996, 1998, 2000a, 2002) reflects the tension between the above two positions best, but for a critical summary of such arguments see Brenner, Jessop and Jones (2003). This chapter is slightly different as it assumes that the notion of a national citizenship is discredited due to the recombinant impact of ethnonationalism and economic globalisation as illustrated by the policies of the BJP Government (1999-2004) in India (Gopalakrishnan 2006).

globalisation and its associated culture of cosmopolitanism because it unbinds the nation-state and denationalises its democracy and citizenship in the process (Falk 1994, 2000; Carter 2001; Bowden 2003; van Steenberg, 1994). However, building genuine conviction around this project is a difficult proposition. Even if 'the notion that there could be a "citizen of the world" has long been part of the utopian imaginary of the citizenship tradition' (Isin and Turner 2002: 8), there is a simultaneous acknowledgement regarding the limited scope of its well-disposed unifying vision. Falk (1994) admits that the most likely candidate for a global citizen of transnational affairs is the business elite who lacks any global civic sense of responsibility, with global capital oppositional to global citizenship. There is a reluctant acknowledgement that it is only aspirational – a project to create a political community that does not yet exist.

According to Carter (2001), democracy still remains a crucial criterion for the functioning of citizenship, and beyond the nation-state there is a dominant presence of transnational corporations and international organisations driven by trade and economic gains, rather than social or political means of establishing a shared sense of community. Moreover, she adds that global citizenship is hardly a credible alternative in many of the postcolonial nation-states. This, she states, is because globalisation is associated with principles of exploitation and evokes strong adverse reactions: the celebrated global citizen is mostly from the West or could be even an indigenous elite, and is invariably the leader of some economic corporation with transnationalised interests, signalling a disguised form of cultural imperialism.

Appadurai's (1996: 177) consideration of the postnational imaginary and the cultural politics of the global modern is initially based on the possibility that transnational social forms may generate postnational yearnings, as it is in these postnational spaces that 'the incapacity of the nation-state to tolerate diversity....may, perhaps, be overcome'. But as he constructs his argument for a world system of images built around nodes of transnational

imaginary landscapes, he is torn by the question of what locality might mean in such a situation. He oscillates between globality and locality and wonders if the latter as a socio-spatial formation representing the anxieties of the nation-state is too weak and contested. This dilemmatic poser is easily addressed by Chatterjee's (1997b) assessment of the same work where he asserts that the need is to look not beyond the nation but within. Appadurai himself resolves this uncertainty in another work in collaboration with Holston (Holston and Appadurai 1996) where he locates the possibility of newer forms of citizenship more assuredly in the 'local' terra firma of cities.

1.4 Cities and citizenship

In 1996, Holston and Appadurai edited an issue of *Public Culture* on *Cities and Citizenship*, now considered a seminal piece in reactivating the discourse on urban citizenship.¹² They discount first the ability of the nation to be a successful arbiter of citizenship, emphasising that liberalism's twentieth-century project of a national society of citizens appears increasingly exhausted and discredited. With the breakdown of civility and nationality that has characterised the post-1989 era, while 'many are seeking alternatives in the post-, trans-, de-, re-, (and plain con) of current speculations about the future of nation-state', they argue that 'until transnations attain more flesh and bone, cities may still be the most important sites in which we experience the crises of national membership and through which we may rethink citizenship' (Holston and Appadurai 1996: 202). Refusing to buy 'the dematerialisation of place as a result of globalisation' argument, they make a case instead for cities which according to them are re-emerging as salient sites of citizenship, engaging best the tumult of citizenship. It is in the *res publica* of cities that citizenship is reconstituted 'to bend to the recognition that contemporary urban life comprises multiple and diverse cultural identities, modes of life, and forms of

¹² The late 1990s witnessed a number of efforts to reconsider the opportunities of urban citizenship. Besides the *Public Culture* issue, *Theory and Society* (1997) published a special issue on *Recasting Citizenship*, and a special issue of *Citizenship Studies* (1999) published a select set of papers from a symposium entitled *Rights to the City: Citizenship, Democracy and Cities in a Global Age* held at York University, Toronto, 26-28 June, 1998.

appropriating urban space' (ibid.: 195). Drawing on Young's (1990) politics of difference, they echo her pursuit of a normative ideal of city life as a vision of social relations affirming group difference. This is further ratified by Isin's (2000) observation that the claims of different groups and identities to citizenship rights is actually thought through the city.¹³

Yet there are scholars who express caution in openly valorising urban citizenship. In the first instance is the awareness that such intentions are not in anyway a pilgrimage to the historically celebrated condition of city-states. Gupta (1997) reminds us of Marx's remarks on the impossibility of returning to ancient Greece. This point is also articulated by Isin (2000), who explains that while western historical imagination is full of images of the birth of democracy and citizenship in ancient Greek cities, its republican transformations in ancient Roman cities, and its revival in medieval European cities, the significance of the city as a milieu cultivating and engendering citizenship through the modern democratic conception of the city does not derive from this history. Secondly, as Bender (1999) observes, cities operate more significantly as socio-economic units, never as independent political organisations. Very few citizenship laws have been enacted at any level below or above the national one, highlighting the reality that the national level remains legal while others are mere negotiations (Isin and Turner 2002).

In addition, there is pessimism about the ability of the current urban metropolis to carry the mantle of citizenship. Isin's (1992) portrayal of modern cities as 'cities without citizens' is akin to Bookchin's (1992) observation that urbanisation has worked against cities and citizenship wherein people trapped in modern-day urban agglomerations cannot be really considered as citizens. This position is shared by Dagger (1981: 716) who rightly argued that:

¹³ At the same time, Holston and Appadurai (1996) acknowledge that cities are as well sites of xenophobic expressions, as in Mumbai, where the Shiv Sena tries to restrict the city and its economic fortunes to the 'local' Marathi inhabitants.

The size, the fragmentation, the fluidity of the population of our swollen metropolises all contribute to the loss of civic memory—the memory which, by tying its residents to the past of a city, enables them to play a part in its present and to help shape its future. As they contribute to the loss of civic memory, so these factors also contribute to the failure of citizenship.

1.4.1 Neoliberal citizenship in globalising cities: urban (vain)glory?

The above assertion that modern urban agglomerations are not conducive to citizenship is enhanced by the concern of whether cities can be proper breeding ground for citizenship in the contemporary condition of globalisation. Surprisingly, the effects of transnationalisation that increasingly link cities in a globally network of flows ranging from capital and goods to labour and ideas is viewed agreeably by some scholars to position cities as favourable containers of citizenship. Holston and Appadurai (1996) insist that in the era of globalisation, cities represent the localisation of global forces – a condition of urban multiplicity spawning new and more democratic forms of citizenship. The local is seen as a site of resistance and liberation emerging in response to managing and controlling global capitalism. Bauböck (2003: 156) is tempted ‘to regard the global city as a new political space within which the meaning of citizenship can be fundamentally redefined’. And the most emphatic support comes from Isin (2000) and Purcell (2003) who argue that global city-regions provide us with concrete sites generating new citizenship rights and obligations, challenging established citizenship structures in a variety of ways.

Nevertheless, Isin’s (2000) conviction that global cities are spaces where the very meaning of citizenship are constructed and transformed cannot be taken at face value and needs to be probed further. Sassen (2000) sets the tone for this when she acknowledges that a new set of dynamics are shaping global cities, as they emerge as key sites for globalised operations. Such cities, through the concentration of both the leading actors of global capital and a growing share of disadvantaged populations, become sites for a whole series of conflicts and contradictions engaging new forms of power. There is some initial enthusiasm about the possibility of new forms of citizenship practices,

but as she admits, despite the claims by global capital over the city's spaces being countered by disadvantaged sections of the urban population, 'the formation of new claims centered on transnational actors and involving contestation raise the question "Whose city is it?"' (Sassen 2000: 50).

With this question looming large, it is difficult to share Purcell's (2003) embrace of the global city as one that imagines a new politics resisting the current neoliberalisation of the global political economy.¹⁴ Purcell (2002, 2003) and Isin (2000) recall Lefebvre's 'right to the city' as a right of the inhabitant to urban life, and contend that by invoking such a right to the global city one is able to challenge and offer resistance to neoliberal forces. Isin's (2000: 14-5) interpretation that 'the right to claim presence in the city, to wrest the use of the city from the privileged new masters and democratize its spaces....as an expression of urban citizenship, understood....as a practice of articulating, claiming and renewing group rights in and through the appropriation and creation of spaces in the city' is laudable. And so is his articulation of the right to the city not as a right to property but as a right to appropriate the city. Similarly, Purcell (2002: 101-02) uses Lefebvre to suggest that '[t]he right to the city stresses the need to restructure the power relations that underlie the production of urban space, fundamentally shifting control away from capital and the state and toward urban inhabitants'. But does this really happen in a neoliberal city's as it positions itself for global connectedness? Doesn't neoliberalism abet the persistent extension of capitalist social relations where large corporations control material life and decrease the power of ordinary citizens?

Even though neoliberalism can claim to have resurrected failing urban economies in many places, doubts persist over the kind of citizenship that functions in this condition, particularly when one suspects that

¹⁴ In this thesis, neoliberalism, at one level, is used in conjunction with globalisation, and concerns the opening up of national economies to global actors. At another level, it refers to the emerging connection between capital (mostly private and global) and the state, reinforcing the private individual and the market, thereby altering the process of social reproduction and control (Smith 2002; Harvey 2005).

neoliberalisation/globalisation results not in economic integration but actually increases poverty and inequality.¹⁵ Amidst concerns that neoliberal economic policies enhance socio-economic polarisation and adversely affect overall human development, is also the fear that the competitive environment for growth and efficiency imposed by the neoliberal preference for markets over politics hinders the development of 'fair' citizenship practices (Brenner and Theodore 2002; 2005). Neoliberal economic and political policies are believed to contribute to the disintegration of the urban imaginary of commensurable citizens, with the teleological notion of common good replaced by the priority of right (Holston and Appadurai 1996).

1.4.2 Claiming the city: the right of being proper and propertied

The principle of right to the city that is now exercised is not quite similar to the one that Purcell (2003) and Isin (2000) assert but rather formed by a bourgeois ethic which doesn't allow for a substantive conception of the good.¹⁶ This priority of right is elevated to a supreme value rejecting the notion of shared allegiance and negating the redistributive right-claims of citizenship. The exertion of right is thus limited to a select few, and to understand better its exclusivity, it is useful to probe Chatterjee's (2004) employment of the notion of propriety as he makes a careful distinction between 'proper' citizens and an 'improper' population to explain the politics of the governed in India. He suggests that while citizens carry the moral connotation of sharing in the sovereignty of the state – and hence of claiming rights in relation to the state – populations do not bear any inherent moral claim. In fact, even though according to the constitution and the laws everyone is a citizen with equal rights, in practice, most of the inhabitants of India are only tenuously and even

¹⁵ This is an ongoing debate between the proponents and opponents of neoliberalisation and its after-effects. See for instance, Wade (2004); Amin (2004); Srinivasan and Wallack (2004); Kiely (2007). For an examination of the spatial ramification of neoliberalism, particularly at the urban scale, see *Antipode* (2002), volume 34, issue 3.

¹⁶ At a philosophical level, the argument is constructed differently, where, privileging the politics of right over the politics of good is seen as the hallmark of a modern liberal political and social order. But in the neoliberal condition, the politics of right takes a moral high ground over the politics of good, as it stakes a claim for a common good, but one that is imagined narrowly as the need of an elite social group, excluding large sections of the society.

then ambiguously rights-bearing citizens in the sense imagined by the constitution.

Chatterjee (2004) further identifies a discernible shift since the 1990s when the idea of the post-industrial globalised metropolis began to circulate in India, and which has driven the wedge further between the citizens and the population, with the 'rightful' demands of the former discriminating against population groups belonging to the urban poor, and claimed on the basis of propriety. In this context, Roy (2003: 475) gathers a forceful argument against the new style of urban developmentalism emerging in the era of neoliberalisation where through various forms of urban restructuring, a bourgeois city that is ordered and orderly is created and justified as a return to the rightful citizens: 'in the name of public interest is the attempt to reclaim urban space for legitimate (read: propertied) citizens'. She highlights the 'social articulation that takes place through repeated rounds of socio-spatial restructuring, to the everyday social grammar through which the paradigm of propertied citizenship is lived and instituted' (ibid.: 464). Arguing that the paradigm of bourgeois citizenship formed in this context only recognises formal rights of property, marginalising the shelter claims of the poor and other vulnerable social groups, she adds that the employment of citizenship is reduced to negotiable claims rather than enforceable rights. Daniel (2000) adopts a similar position and draws a parallel with the emergent bourgeoisie of the Enlightenment where property was the prerequisite "authorisation" required to participate properly as a citizen, and those who were incapable of maintaining a "proper" relationship with property were pathologised and portrayed as threats to the vital linkage between property and citizenship.

Of significance is the fact that this new version of the politics of right based on the notion of being proper and propertied is gaining formidable presence in cities of the global south dominated by a neoliberal agenda of urban development. Globalisation and neoliberalisation are processes that affect all cities, albeit in varying degrees. Appadurai (2000b) maintains that

cities like Mumbai are the loci of the practices of predatory global capital, seducing global capital in their own particular ways, and appearing as images of globalisation that are in the end cracked and refracted. The troubling aspect of this phenomenon is not only that such cities are the sites of various uncertainties about citizenship, as Appadurai (2000b) asserts, but also that the ensuing citizenship discourse is exclusive to select social groups. This highlights the need to address the role of class in making citizenship claims. While class and citizenship have had an entangled relationship historically (see the following section), neoliberalism's perpetuating socio-economic inequalities complicates it further, making it necessary to place class concerns literally in the 'middle' of citizenship matters.

1.5 Class and citizenship: the return of the 'bourgeois' citizen

Marshall's (1994) take on the conflict of citizenship and class is well-known. Here he postulates that as citizenship is based on a status of equality and class on a system of inequality, the rise of capitalism will inevitably set up a conflict between the two. The supposedly annulling relationship between citizenship and class compels some to propose that citizenship and class are analytical instruments to be used interchangeably and that in the contemporary condition of new social identities, citizenship rather than a redundant class apparatus would be a more appropriate tool to understanding the major social issues of the 1990s (van Steenberg 1994). In reality, the two remain firmly intertwined and in the event of citizenship's inability to reconcile the various classes to the status of full membership to the society, citizenship risks becoming an architect of social inequality, particularly in the current heightened phases of capitalism associated with neoliberalisation and globalisation.

Another stumbling block is the rise of alternative understandings of citizenship, particularly based on the politics of difference, downplaying the tacit relationship between citizenship and class with the argument that the latter doesn't work in light of the many forms of cultural exclusion interacting with common citizenship in different ways (Kymlicka 1998). Such arguments pit

the centrality of identity rather than class to citizenship claims are generally constructed around the larger 'demise of class' argument. This is explored in the next chapter where the relevance of bringing class back in amidst the challenge posed by identity-based politics is examined in greater detail. Of more relevance here is the fact that the possibility of viewing citizenship debates through a class-based lens is hindered by the tendency of current literature (particularly those on global cities) to be reductionist about class. It tends to view class conflict rather simplistically, between a global or transnational elite and an underclass (Isin 1999; cf. Sassen 1991; Hamnett 1994).

According to Isin (1999), this reduction not only fails to analyse the new class formations in the process but also makes class an easy prey to accusation that as a concept it can no longer capture the principles of social differentiation in advanced capitalism. He pleads for an analysis of globalising cities as sites of class and group conflicts, and focuses – for this purpose on the spectre of a new image of the citizen – the new middle class. His proposal for studying the 'professional-citizens' is constructed at two levels. Firstly on the basis that the new middle class is the class that allows us to make a new relationship between class and citizenship in a way anticipated by TH Marshall but never pursued. Secondly, because 'studies that focus on insurgent practices of citizenship should be balanced with studies that focus on the new professions in the global city rather than opposing insurgent practices against an imaginary global or transnational elite' (ibid.: 281).

That the middle class have much to gain from the neoliberal agenda is highlighted by Boschken (2003) who, in outlining the unfolding of a new urban habitat reorienting itself towards global connectedness, and draws attention to the crucial position of the new middle class in moulding the city into an integrated global economy. Clarifying that the urban middle class is more than a "marker" of the global city, he describes their presence as a significant force

in policy outcomes that tailor the cityscape to meet the demands of global exchange.

In a developing society like India, this aspect is emphasised where the rise of a 'new' middle class is highly noticeable, and whose presence is considered crucial to the negotiation of India's new relationship with the global economy.¹⁷ This is explored in detail in Chapter Two, and it is suffice to mention here that the growing cultural visibility of the middle class parallels a shift in political culture as well as mainstream political discourses depicting the middle class as the representative citizens of liberalising India (Fernandes 2006). In fact, the bourgeois nature of neoliberal citizenship and its paradigmatic emphasis on propriety and property links to the middle-class claims to the city that Chatterjee (2004) notes. Thus, according to Chatterjee (2004), 'proper citizens' are the normative citizens drawn from the urban middle class and the elites in Indian cities, prompting him to ask: *'Are Indian cities are becoming bourgeois at last? Or, if you prefer, we could exclaim: Are Indian cities becoming bourgeois, alas?'* (2004: 131, emphasis added).

1.6 Research objective

The aim of this research is to examine the current rationale employed by the Indian middle class to redefine citizenship in the urban condition through a bourgeois reinterpretation of 'right to the city' and the re-presentation of themselves as 'proper citizens'. The objective of the research can be summarised within the following question:

Given the embourgeoisement of cities and citizenship, how is the neoliberalised middle class in Indian cities employing its bourgeois sensibilities of propriety and right to paraphrase urban citizenship and its claims to the city?

Even though the theoretical and empirical investigation of this question is limited to the social category of the middle class, the research is a deeper

¹⁷ This will be discussed in detail in *Chapter Two*.

inquiry into the structural transformation of the conceptualisation of citizenship where one particular group attempts to extend its interpretation into a master narrative. The research examines the bourgeois vocabulary employed by this social group in framing its discourse of citizenship, and the process through which it is standardised and normalised.

Chapter Two is a theoretical undertaking in understanding the middle class, and their relevance to the ongoing debates on class and culture. It focuses on a discussion of the literature on middle class in general, and the Indian middle class in particular. In addition to charting the evolution of this social group from the 'old' to the 'new', the chapter examines the significance of the middle class in a postcolonial scenario, such as India, where they are considered to be elitist and part of the dominant ruling coalition. A primary objective of the chapter is also to chart the political construction of this social group and how it operates as a proponent of modernity and democracy. Given the contradictory nature of citizenship and class, the middle class play a key role as a dialectic in this conflict, as they attempt to reformat a new notion of postcolonial citizenship.

Chapter Three discusses the methodology adopted, comprising a qualitative approach of semi-structured interviews with middle-class residents from two neighbourhoods in the city, both of which represent and highlight at a heightened level the aspirations of the city and its residents to a neoliberal, globalising status. Eighty four interviews were conducted with 110 residents in 2003-2004, initially for a period of eight months, followed six months later by a 6-week second visit. Most of the respondents (84) comprised of young (under 40 years) homeowners who had an active exposure to the ongoing transnationalisation of their city. The research question is tackled through an analysis of primary material gathered from these interviews. They focus on the empowerment of the middle class through their orchestration and manipulation of the citizenship-associated apparatuses of civil society and public sphere in

presenting themselves as the champions of the city. A discourse analysis of this material constitutes the core of the two empirical chapters.

Before that, *Chapter Four* sets out the backdrop in terms of the policies and planning of an increasingly bourgeois state. While it is essential to establish the recent practices of the state in preparing a neoliberal 'field' and what it means for subsequent citizenship claims of the new middle class, at another level this chapter seeks to fill a particular void in terms of writings on Indian cities. Sundaram (2002) emphasises the need to steer clear of the older narratives of developmentalism and any larger frameworks of looking for *the Indian City*, focussing rather on particular cities. This trend is evident in the way Roy (2002) has composed a *City Requiem* for Calcutta, Hansen (2002) charts the *Wages of Violence* through the problems of naming and identity in postcolonial Bombay, and Dupont et al. (2000) portray the alchemy of an unloved city in Delhi amongst its *Urban Space and Human Destinies*. Such an effort is sadly missing in the case of Chennai where academic writing is non-existent and popular writers restrict themselves to an anthology of nostalgic reveries about a city that once was. This chapter fills in this gap by recovering the city from the margins of academic and literary writing and raising it to a new public discourse interweaving its development with the political economy objectives emphasising the agenda of 'bourgeois urbanism'.

The empirical investigations of *Chapter Five* revolve around the 'civil society' initiatives of middle-class residents' associations and raise questions concerning their ability to provide an alternative model of civil society. How this form of social organisation holds the prospect of an active form of citizenship for the middle class constitutes the crux of this chapter. Acknowledging that participation in myriad forms of collective social endeavour does not necessarily entail civic participation, it explores whether these associations are merely pursuing the same self-serving path as other rent-seeking groups in the city. To understand if they can function as a genuine form of civil society this chapter considers their willingness to participate and

facilitate a politics of partnership – firstly in the form of cross-class alliances with other residents' associations (particularly other social classes), secondly by extending a sense of public spiritedness by taking up 'civil society' issues outside of mere civic infrastructure concerns, and finally, engaging with the democratic state as citizens on city-wide issues not limiting themselves to the role of benefit seeking patrons from a clientalist state.

Chapter Six tests the extent to which the public sphere as a crucial realm for the social foundations of democracy is an ideal terrain for an active enactment of citizenship. Limiting itself to the physical representation of the public sphere, that is, public spaces, this chapter focuses on the recent debates surrounding the re-imagining of the beaches in the city. With a shoreline of 20 Km, beaches are the most prominent form of open spaces, eagerly sought after by both the state and the society. This chapter examines in the first instance the state's vision for the Marina Beach, the most public beach in the city, and the politics of partnership it entailed amongst the actors who rose in response to its initiatives. The second part of the chapter looks at the parochial beach stretches in the city, where the politics of partnership mainly involves the middle-class residents inhabiting the shoreline neighbourhoods, as they (dis)engage with the fishermen and the state in their pursuit of a new beach imaginary. Crucial to this exercise is a process of othering, wherein the middle class use the discourse of dirt and danger to identify the impropriety of 'others'. Overall, this chapter highlights the growing contradiction between middle-class aspirations for developing the public spaces as spaces of modernity and the spaces of democracy that they are generally imagined to be.

2

Epistemology and ontology of the (Indian) middle class

If the nineteenth century belonged to the industrial bourgeoisie, the twentieth has belonged to the middle class. (Bhatia 1994: 1)

Amongst the myriad events that have come to mark 1989 as an epochal year (at least in the academic circles) is the publication of the English translation of Habermas's *The Structural Transformations of the Public Sphere*. First published in 1962, the book shows how historically an emergent European bourgeoisie initially managed to free the public sphere from an absolutist state by emphasising rational-critical debate but lost control as it was transformed into a place of passive consumption. Almost thirty years on, the significance of this book in reaching a wider audience was such that a conference was held in September 1989 to celebrate and contemplate the book's continued relevance. Given the larger political events of its time, the conference was seen as not just an abstract, academic undertaking (Calhoun 1992), with Habermas (1992b) himself recognising a more than mere coincidence with the events of 1989.

Besides the central position that the book's theme of civil society and public sphere have come to occupy since then, scholars have questioned its other core focus – the *bourgeois* domination of these spheres via an emphasis on enlightenment and specialised forms of knowledge (see Calhoun 1992; Hill and Montag 2000; Negt and Kluge 1993). While early German Marxists criticised Habermas for idealising the bourgeois public sphere (Calhoun 1992), Fraser (1990, 1992) challenged its projection as the originary moment, and

criticised Habermas for a number of significant exclusions. She insisted that “subaltern counterpublics” existed simultaneously and contentiously with the bourgeois public, even though unequally empowered, along lines of gender, ethnicity, class and popular culture. Following the proliferation and successful campaign of mass movements promoting identities based on race, gender, and sexual difference, it seemed as if the bourgeois public sphere was just one among many public spheres, with its hegemony challenged by competing alternatives. It was this belief that prompted Hill and Montag (2000: 3) to declare that ‘[t]he public sphere as discussed in the work of the 1990s is no longer “bourgeois” either in its origins or in its actual functioning at present’.

Nevertheless, conclusions forecasting the redundancy of a dominant bourgeois presence do seem to have been hastily drawn. Some view the ‘counterpublic spheres’ such as Fraser’s feminist public sphere as a bourgeois subcategory variant that functions as a valuable corrective for bourgeois women, but hardly an alternative to it (Daniel 2000). Also, as Daniel (2000) explains, the official national public sphere is still very much bourgeois in nature wherein, wearing the mask of universality, the bourgeois subject controls the terms of public discussion of his/her interest, without ever having to acknowledge them. It is the bourgeois subject who carries cultural authority, is the personification of capital, and by appearing disembodied and disinterested, is able to speak for everyone in general but no one in particular.

Amidst these arguments, if the bourgeois public sphere still comes across as a debilitated realm, it is mainly due to Habermas’s (1992) admission that his definition is not based on the class composition of its members. Through a vague generalisation of his notion of the bourgeois, he not only did not acknowledge class conflict in the public sphere (Hill and Montag 2000), but as Joshi (2001) notes, in missing the class aspects, he also failed to dwell on the extent to which it helped to create and shape a distinctive middle-class identity, and the crucial role played by the middle class in sustaining a bourgeois sphere. Joshi (2001) sees this as a major drawback failing to

recognise the way in which men “of a middling sort” came together under a middle-class identity in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century through a shared moral code, initiated a new cultural politics, interposed themselves between “people of rank and the common people”, and became hegemonic the world over.

Joshi’s (2001) argument compels us to view the political events of 1989 in a new light. Integral to the revival of civil society and public sphere is the rescuing of a condition long neglected as outdated or merely “bourgeois” (Kumar 1993), and despite the participation of social groups ranging from the working class and the peasants to the intellectuals, the communicative stream of civil society and a vital public sphere was very much embedded in the normative expressions of a bourgeois class. A prominent objective of the revolutions of 1989 was, in reality, the creation of conditions in which a middle class could arise, instrumental to establishing a “hegemonic bourgeois class” and instilling a political legitimacy for a liberal political system.

Agh (1994) identified the emergence of a large middle class as the most important historical process after the collapse of communism in Central and Eastern Europe, transforming the comrade into the citizen. Thus, for societies that under state socialism were believed to be peculiarly ‘classless’ in structure, class became an important paradigm in explaining the transition process (Lane 2005), with the middle class a key measure of its success or failure (Vecernik 1997; Paczynska 2005). Even parties like Solidarity in Poland, despite its predominant blue-collar membership, argued that the interests of its workers were ‘best served by accepting deep sacrifices on behalf of a [middle] class that did not even exist, in return for benefits that it was hoped....would accrue in the future’ (Ost 1993: 465). Substantiating this is Kocka’s (1995) statement that post-1989, even though the so-called ‘transition’ societies have not become thoroughly “bourgeois”, the middle class has won against its opponents, moving far beyond the social segments where it originated and which it once helped to define.

This triggering of an unprecedented interest in the middle class is not restricted to Eastern and Central Europe, but carries a wider universal appeal. Pro-democracy movements in China and Southeast Asia laid a similar emphasis on the middle class as important actors in the political transformations of the region (Chen 2005; Embong 2001a; Robison and Goodman 1996), while in Latin America, the position of the middle class in economic development, especially in light of the recurring debt crisis, is being reassessed with attempts to restore them to a more prominent socio-political relevance (Davis 2004). In India, Mazzarella (2005) suggests that the figure of the Indian middle class has become one of the main idioms through which a series of contemporary concerns are brought into critical juxtaposition, along with anxiety about the relationship between normative discourses of political practice and more corporeal dimensions of contemporary public life.

Ironically, this scholarly fetish for the middle class is set amidst concurrent debates about the relevance of class as an appropriate analytic instrument for understanding the social upheavals of the 1990s. This chapter begins by first addressing the relevance of the middle class against the debate of whether class still matters. Central to this discussion is the issue of whether the middle class, particularly in postcolonial societies, can be considered as a dominant class or at least an ally of a dominant class. The nature of the middle class in such societies creates a perception that it is actually an elite bourgeois category. Such a postulation gains greater currency in the context of the rise of the 'new' middle class. The middle section of the chapter then focuses on this 'new' social group, emphasising the need to look beyond its popular portrayals as an all-consuming class. It investigates the various mechanisms through which they have come to be associated with the global structural changes caused by globalisation and neoliberalisation. Following this, the final section considers the way in which a bourgeois middle class, despite its historic association with modernity, democracy and citizenship, is now redefining the parameters of citizenship apolitically sans democracy and modernity. This

section illustrates how the new Indian middle class amidst its oscillating tendencies between periods of quiet political absenteeism and moments of active citizenship, attempts to rework citizenship to address its own narrow concerns.

2.1 Resolving some Marxist concerns about (middle) class

The explosion of identity politics in the 1980s that spawned 'new' social movements, now commonly acknowledged as the post-structuralist 'cultural turn', questioned the capacity of class-based studies to address the increasingly complex aspects of social difference (Smith 2001). But if class was being outclassed by newer social categories such as race, gender and sexuality, it was partly its own undoing. Most Marxist scholars using class for social analysis have had to cope with the fact that Marx neither specified clearly what constitutes a class nor systematically explained the central idea of class struggle, being imprecise and inconsistent in using the concept (Carter 1985; Abercrombie and Urry 1983). Even though subsequent scholars have defined class more concretely as a means of social differentiation (for instance, Wright 1985, 1989, 1991; Giddens 1973), Marxist scholars have been criticised for dealing with the questions of social difference within the narrow confines of class and its universalist framework of master narratives.¹⁸ Moreover, the branching out of class studies into Marxist and Weberian traditions of sociological analysis has not been theoretically profitable either as it was widely believed that class, in this split application could only be something of a background variable.¹⁹ In western societies, class based analyses also suffered from their inadequacy to explain the changes to capitalist operations – flexible,

¹⁸ This relates mostly to the rise of identity politics, starting with the feminist critique which found class insufficient to accommodate gender issues, and expanding to include race, sexuality, and other interest-specific concerns. See for instance, Young (1990); Calhoun (1994); Bondi (1993) amongst others.

¹⁹ Marx's notion of class is a purely economic phenomenon related to the means of production, while Weber conceived of class in terms of status groups distinguished by particular styles of life involving both production and consumption. Traditionally, social analysts either adopted a Marxist or Weberian approach, although it is now acknowledged that an adequate theory may well need to be eclectic, incorporating and rejecting elements of both approaches (Abercrombie and Urry 1983).

post-fordist, advanced, and so forth (Carter 1985). But it was not just this that Pakulski and Waters (1996) criticised analysts for manufacturing class where it no longer exists as a meaningful social entity. Marxists scholars have also been criticised for their reductivist understanding of class structure, where, drawing on Marx's two-class model lumping heterogeneous layers of social groups into the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, they failed to explain sufficiently the position of the middle class within the class structure (Wright 1989; Giddens 1995; Burris 1986; Wacquant 1991; Carchedi 1975).

Occupying an ambiguous position in the class stratification ladder, the middle class, according to the Marxist scholars, lacks a clear class identity, unable to embrace any form of conflict: 'class awareness, rather than class consciousness, is the typical cognitive perspective of the middle class...Conflict and struggle play a part in this imagery, but primarily in terms of the striving of the individual to secure a social position which accords with his talents and zeal, not as any sort of class confrontation' (Giddens 1995: 112). This understanding mainly stems from Marx's prediction in his *Communist Manifesto* (co-authored with Engels) that the middle mass of the petty bourgeoisie, small producers, artisans and craftsmen would gradually disappear, joining one or the other camp, i.e. the bourgeoisie or the proletariat (Dahrendorf 1959).

Although it is now clear that Marx did caution against neglecting the growing middle class, and recognised its mediating power (Giddens 1995; Wacquant 1991), there is still a tendency to see the middle class not as a true class but as a contradictory location within class relations exhibiting both capitalist and labour affinities (Wright 1985). Such a portrayal fails to explain accordingly the expanding middle class and its role in capitalist development (Carter 1985). It is even alleged that this failure to construct an adequate Marxist concept of the middle class led to many questioning the general theory of class itself (Wright 1985, 1991). In contemporary times, the radical reorganisation of class also means that a majority identify themselves as

middle class (Seabrook 2002). This, according to Smith (2001), is actually a euphemism for classlessness, with class consciousness sublimated beneath the familiar self-deception that we are all middle class now. Against the diminished analytical yield for studying class concepts, the investigation of the middle class proves challenging, standing as a residual group that everyone identifies themselves with but one that Marxists and liberalists alike find problematic to categorise (Deshpande 2006).

2.1.1 Insisting on class

While Herring and Agarwala (2006) in their account of a disappearing class theory explain that global intellectual dispensations have militated against class analysis, it is not as if class loyalists have taken this onslaught lying down. Rather, they have persistently argued that class is still a powerful analytical tool with sufficient mileage to understand the complexities of social and historical processes, and that its continued application is more relevant given the greater magnitude of class differences (McNall et al. 1991; Wright 1996, 1997; Scott 2001). Smith (2001: 1012) for instance believes that 'the period since the 1970s may well represent an era of unprecedented global class formation and restructuring,.....so-called globalization is dramatically remaking class relations at a time when the focus of much European and North American academic research has been directed elsewhere'.

Those who still subscribe to the continued significance of class often point to the growing income inequalities where class plays a greater role than ever before. Wright (1996) asks if inequalities in the distribution of capital have declined to a point that it doesn't matter in people's lives, and if the extraction of labour effort is no longer a problem in capitalist firms. Similarly, Fernandes (2006) argues that understanding the structuralist dimension of class formation captures the enduring reproduction of social inequalities and the ways in which such inequalities are systematically structured by shifts in economic policy. This is clarified by Seabrook (2002) as he adds that inequality is an abstraction that is often conveniently employed by the rich to

replace earlier concepts of class, as ordinary people are absent from inequality whereas in class relationships people are omnipresent.

At another level, there is an increasing acknowledgement that it is limiting to think of culture and class politics as distinct categories and that they are more interpenetrating than one would like to admit. Thus, McNall et al. (1991) made their appeal on the basis that the 'new' social movements and the newer politics of identity continue to be shaped by class, an argument picked up by Smith's (2001) emphasis that class is thickly written through the cultural, political and economic landscapes we interrogate. He is convinced that opposition on the basis of race and gender are imbricated with economic exploitation rooted in class difference. Struggles to dismantle racial and gendered oppressions therefore very quickly confront class issues at the heart of the social economy (Fraser 1998, 1999; Harvey 1993; Young 1999). He further contends that critics of class analysis are mistaking the increasing complexity of class relations for the dissolution of class altogether, adding that social theory debates cannot operate as hermetically separated concepts as they overlap with one another.

Class in India: being 'out-casted'

While such arguments against the irrelevance of class have been fairly successful in the western context, in developing societies like India, it has been more difficult to restore class to a conceptually credible status. This is mainly because, at least in India, social groups are not well-defined in class terms, with the politically active groups and movements of recent times resisting easy definition, and being constructed more on an exceptionalism of cultural identity based on caste, religion and ethnicity (Deshpande 2006; Fernandes and Heller 2006). Despite obvious growing income inequalities, Herring and Agarwala (2006) note the difficulty in employing class-based analysis in India where there is greater latitude to deploy social identities rather than class-relevant programmes. The problem in India is the religious-cultural overlay on class stratification especially because 'economic class has always seemed too

simplistic and materialist a concept for the richly stratified layers and dimensions of privilege and deprivation in Indic society' (ibid.: 334).²⁰

Scholars have also had to contend with the overall scepticism of whether a concept and type that was developed in nineteenth-century Europe can be superimposed on contemporary Asian societies where a postcolonial critique of Western theoretical conceptions of class and capitalism have prompted a shift towards an exclusive focus on cultural identities such as caste and ethnicity (Fernandes 2006). Such a tendency however has been strongly refuted by Dirlik (1997) who identifies the disavowal of class relations as one of the outstanding deficiencies of postcolonial criticism. Akin to Smith's (2001) identification of a class and identity overlap, Indian scholars tackle the consciousness that caste and not class is the criterion of backwardness in Indian society by arguing that class formations are substantively shaped by the reworking of inequalities of caste, language, religion, and gender. They maintain that class analysis sensitive to a social embedding such as caste can be an indispensable conceptual tool in explaining social differences in India (Fernandes 2006; Sathyamurthy 1996; Herring and Agarwala 2006).

2.1.2 Class/culture convergence in the middle

Paradoxically, if there is one social category that has succeeded in gaining advantage from these efforts to restore agency to class it is the middle class. For, in recent years, it is the middle class that has captured best the shift signifying the 'cultural turn' of class. As social class shapes distinct cultural subsystems and the new social movements promote goals that cut across class lines to include gender, race, sexuality and locality, it is equally evident that their membership is drawn primarily from the middle class which benefits disproportionately from these movement campaigns (Rose 1997; Aronowitz 1992). The profound realignment of people's sense of self as expressed through

²⁰ This belief constitutes the background of recent historical empirical studies of peasants and the working class challenging a clear functioning of class consciousness (Chakravarty 1989; Fernandes 1997; cf. Basu 2004).

women's movements, consciousness of race and ethnicity, and assertion of sexual orientation reaffirm the rise of the middle class (Seabrook 2002). In India, Fernandes (2006) explains that while identities such as caste, gender and religion provide segments of the middle class with an important source of capital, middle-class identity is equally constructed through class as well. As 'the resolution of the class question in India doubtless passes, even today, through the caste question' (Ahmed 2001: 20), it finds its best expression in the middle class whose handling of caste related issues is akin to that of class actions.

The middle class thus highlights an increasingly probable interface between class and culture, which is best understood by combining cultural modes of analysis, outlining a social relational perspective on culture, class and social differentiation.²¹ This way of unifying and defining characteristics of the middle class via a relational and cultural theory (Kocka 1995) is particularly helpful, given the inability of this social category to be defined or understood using traditional sociological indicators of income and occupation (Joshi 2001). The elusive nature of defining the middle-class category in precise socio-economic terms is well-known, and popularly described as the 'boundary problem' (Abercrombie and Urry 1983). Wacquant (1991) argued that any epistemic ambition of defining the "real" boundaries of the middle class is doomed to fail because it rests on a fundamentally mistaken conception of the ontological status of classes, and that theories of the middle class should consciously strive to capture the essential ambiguity of their object rather than dispose of it.²² In most cases, the middle class is a lazily defined heterogeneous group of people (excluding nobles, peasants, and the lower-mass of workers)

²¹ This refers back to Bourdieu's vast body of work, most notably *Distinction* (1984), where he argued that class distinctions of the economy inevitably generate the symbolic distinctions of culture, which in turn regenerate and legitimate the class structure. Bourdieu's work not only triggered a spectrum of cultural scholarship but also provided a new paradigm for understanding middle class formation and reproduction, as seen, for instance in Savage *et al.*'s (1992) work on a contemporary analysis of *Property, bureaucracy and culture: middle class formation in Britain*.

²² This thesis adopts Wacquant's (1991) suggestion and does not attempt a definitional elaboration (at least quantitatively) of this amorphous social group.

differing in occupation and economic status, gender and region, religion and ethnicity (Kocka 1995). With members ranging from liberal and intellectual radicals to the right-wing conservatives, the middle class has been seen as a fragmented entity provoking many to address it in plural — middle classes (Wright 1991; Kocka 1995).²³ To a large extent, this raises the question of whether the middle class is then simply a catch-all label with no analytical purpose (Joshi 2001), or if there is a value for social and cultural analyses (Lakha 1999), what is its positional relevance, and what does it really signify?

2.2 Significance of being in the middle

Scholars highlighting the relevance of the middle class argue in the first instance against a simplified polarised clustering of class forces between two conceptual extremes, failing to bring notice to the complexity in the middle. This is seen in Davis's (2004) call for a shift in attention away from the two principle class protagonists of development that have dominated the literature for the last several decades, the big manufacturing capitalists and waged industrial labourers, to an examination of the class force in the middle. She argues that the middle class prominently enables the state to impose political and economic discipline on the capitalists and labourers in the absence of which the demands of capital and labour follow rent-seeking, short-term profit maximisation, higher wage rates and protectionist measures. Sridharan (2004) similarly observes that the rapid growth of a new middle class in India changes its class structure from one characterised by a sharp contrast between a small elite and a large impoverished mass, to one with a substantial intermediate class. This is actually a classic standpoint that can be traced back to Aristotle's famous statement (2000 [306 BC]: 169) that:

the best political community is formed by citizens of the middle class, and that those states are likely to be well-administered, in which the middle class is large, and larger if possible than both the other classes, or at any rate than either singly, for the addition of the middle class turns the scale and prevents either of the extremes from being dominant.

²³ This was substantiated on field where middle class participants represented a heterogeneous mass, subscribing to all kinds of political, social, and economic ideologies.

Over the centuries, this statement has become an aphorism of sorts where the opposite of a middle-class society is believed to be an unequal one, highly polarised between a rich elite and an impoverished majority.

But when Deshpande (2003) presents the middle class as a “centrist” group that can avoid political and economic extremes, and promotes its attractiveness as a social location, it is difficult to accept his assertion of its moral legitimacy and qualification to act or speak on behalf of society. There is concern about the desirability of this middleness, and whether an “average” class can be seen as one that best represents society as a whole. This is because its location within the class structure deems that the middle class occupies a relational rather than an oppositional position, hardly concerned with conflicts of material interest (Giddens 1995). Despite such doubts, in the context of developing countries, the general perception is that the middle class is significant as a politically salient class actor. This stems from a conviction that they play a greater role as both a dominant class as well as an ally of the dominant class in the state-led capitalist modernisation of the late-industrialising societies than is generally acknowledged (Davis 2004).

2.2.1 Capitalist state ally

A characteristic feature of most postcolonial states is that it is intensely middle-class-embedded through the presence of the latter within the state machinery in various forms and roles (Davis 2004). Rather than assuming that the state is autonomous and have at best the capitalists as its preferred partner, she argues for an ‘understanding of the state in ways that capture its social or class composition as understood by the occupations that comprise it’ (ibid.: 51). And, instead of seeing the state as a homogeneous institutional actor, and treating it as an organisational structure where only the highest-level political leaders and a few key decision makers are thought of as conceptually relevant state actors, she views it in terms of the heterogeneous personnel whose salaries come from the state and who can only be understood in middle class

terms. The state, after all, is the single largest employer in late-industrialising countries responsible for the livelihood of a considerable percentage of a national labour force, including educated professionals, clerks, and lower-level workers. In short, the state apparatus is essentially drawn from the different levels of the middle class.

Stern (2003) describes a similar situation in India where the rapidly growing middle class became the director and constituency of political and economic change mainly via its representation inside the state as technocrats and bureaucrats (see also Vanaik 1990; Varma 1999). Through its participation in the decision making process, the middle class, even though not economically and politically dominant, was able to find efficient ways of interfering with public policies and establish conditions in accord with its needs. The growth of the middle class was stimulated further as the postcolonial state's nationalist-development policies centred on import-substitution industrialisation was managed and implemented by the middle class. This was primarily through their role as planners, adjudicators and regulators, technical experts, and managers of India's industrial growth. This is not unique to India but typical in other countries where political independence was not accompanied by an armed struggle. Instead, when a condition of state-driven capitalism takes over, the middle class emerges as the operating force, giving rise to what Kalecki (1972, cited in Unni 2006) described as the "intermediate regime", one that is equidistant from the capitalist and socialist blocs.

This characteristic was summarised best by Bardhan (2004) when he presented the political economy of India as a coalition of the three dominant proprietary classes in the economy: the rich farmers, the industrial bourgeoisie and the professional classes (particularly those in the state bureaucracy). According to him, 'if physical capital can be the basis of class stratification, so can be human capital in the form of education, skills and technical expertise' (2004: 51). He argues that the usual Marxist practice of submerging the middle class in the petty bourgeoisie and treating them as an "auxiliary class" can be

highly misleading in a country with high illiteracy, where the educated elite enjoy a high scarcity value, and are constantly involved in attempts to protect their scarcity value.²⁴

This is not dissimilar to the way the role of the intelligentsia has been evaluated in state-socialist societies. Szelenyi (1982) examines Gouldner's (1979) observation that professionalism leads intellectuals into the dominant class position using the rule of "cultural capital" to replace the rule of money capital. While he clarifies that professionals emphasising the significance of their 'expert' knowledge cannot claim class power on their own, he acknowledges the more important role intellectuals play as they not only have executive skills but also moral commitment and historical vision. Through a class power that stretches beyond the economic sphere guaranteeing social reproduction in state-socialist societies, they became the dominant class in East European societies. This is evident in India where the intelligentsia is involved intimately in running the state apparatus, providing leadership to all the currents of political thought and action from the extreme right to the extreme left (Rudra 1989).

But there is some degree of disagreement over whether this same intelligentsia can be equated with the middle class. If Rudra (1989) is convinced that the intelligentsia are drawn from the middle class, Beteille (1989) argues that Rudra's concept of the intelligentsia differs from the more popular idea of the middle class. He observes that the term intelligentsia is not part of the English vocabulary and is more familiarly employed in Central and Eastern Europe, particularly the Soviet Union. Seen in this way, intelligentsia is that category of class formation that cannot be fully explained by economic argument alone. Bardhan (1989) prefers the term professional classes instead of the intelligentsia, a category he believes will become more important as the

²⁴ Abercrombie and Urry (1983) highlight the relationship between capitalism and credentialism where educational credentials are necessary for access to particular places within the social division of labour. It is also natural for such credentials to be hierarchically structured where particular groups effect a degree of social closure by limiting access to specific educational credentials.

economy becomes more complex, and information and organisation resources acquire higher market value. Vanaik (1990) on the other hand uses intelligentsia and middle class interchangeably, as he believes that they are all formulations of similar vagueness.

What is undeniable though is the focus of these scholars on the educated Indian middle class as professionals and as part of the intelligentsia who have infiltrated the state apparatus at various levels. Unlike in the West, where the middle class emerged as a result of economic and technological change and engaged in trade and industry, in India, they developed as a consequence of changes in the system of law and public administration as a result of which the dominant strand was literary and professional (Misra 1961). The bulk of the Indian middle class thus consists of the intelligentsia – public servants, other salaried employees, and members of the learned professions. And while Palshikar (2001) stresses the need for rooting the middle class in class theory instead of treating them as intellectual leaders or elites, this is precisely the tendency in India. The middle class is often automatically equated with the elite, forcing the question of whether, as a capitalist state ally, it can be considered as constituting the elite.

2.2.2 Elite tendencies²⁵

It is ironic that a social category that first emerged by placing itself in a critical position against the nobility and aristocracy now suggests a closer alliance with the elite. Kocka (1995), in speculating on this shift explains that as the middle class began to face challenges from the rise of workers' politics, the offensive challenge to the old elite that had been central to middle-class politics was replaced by a defensive self-distancing from those below. As the split between the middle class and 'the people' grew, the circles of property and education merged. Moreover, Marxist scholars like Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich (1979)

²⁵ Fieldwork experiences of interviewing the middle class and whether they come across as an elite social group is addressed in the methodology chapter.

argued that while the class of salaried professionals and managers may not own the means of production, their major function in the social division of labour is still broadly the reproduction of capitalist culture and capitalist class relations. Their tendency to ally with the capitalists is only natural given this connection in terms of production and consumption dynamics.

In the Indian context, the question becomes even more pertinent as there is never ending speculation over whether the Indian middle class is actually an elite category or not. This perception dates back to the colonial times when the British presented the Indian nationalist movement for independence led by the middle class as an elitist effort cut off from the masses of the Indian society (Markovits 2001). Emerging in a liminal space between the colonial state and the traditional elites, it is true that the middle class aspired to an elite status by displacing the former two and presenting itself as the vanguard of the people. Thus, the large stratum of urban professionals that provided all the leaders of the nationalist movement was identified as the educated middle-class elite (Vanaik 1990). As the middle class occupied prominent positions within the postcolonial state bureaucracy, it was assumed that the middle class is ideologically homogeneous with the ruling elite.

Scholars generally reaffirm the poser of whether the Indian middle class can be considered as an elite group through enumeration exercises. They show that 'what is popularly called the Indian "middle class" is actually not in the middle but almost at the top of the income distribution' (Deshpande 2006: 218; Vanaik 2004). Analysing the consumer expenditure survey conducted during the 55th round of the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) 1999-2000, Deshpande (2003, 2006) establishes that the so-called 'middle class' is really at the very top of the expenditure distribution, with only the top

ten to fifteen percent qualifying as the middle class.²⁶ Unlike in the West, he notes that the 'middle class' in India is not the 'middle income group' but is located much higher on the income (expenditure) hierarchy. It is thus argued that the middle class is in reality an affluent class and to use this term is misleading in relation to the actual economic location of this social group. Similarly, Sridharan (2004: 414) uses the National Council for Applied Economic Research (NCAER) data of 2002 to compute the Indian middle class, and finds that 'the "broadest," or most encompassing, conception of the middle class – remains a minority'. According to him, by 1998-99, in its most elite form, the middle class is only 6 percent of the population and in its "broadest" it is 26 percent of the population (Table 1).

Table 1: Recent efforts at measuring the Indian middle class

Estimated distribution of households by income groups (%): Sridharan (2004) based on NCAER, India Market Demographics Report 2002					
Annual Income (Rs. At 1998-99 prices)	1989-90	1992-93	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99
Urban					
Up to 35,000 (Lower)	37.14	38.44	24.46	21.87	18.96
35,001-70,000 (Lower middle)	34.76	32.97	34.69	34.42	33.76
70,001-105,000 (Middle)	17.89	16.07	21.33	22.11	22.59
105,001-140,000 (Upper middle)	6.46	7.62	10.55	11.29	12.16
> 140,000 (High)	3.75	4.90	8.98	10.30	12.53
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Broadest middle class (M+UM+H)	28.10	28.59	40.86	43.70	47.28
Expanded middle class (UM+H)	10.21	12.52	19.53	21.59	24.69
Elite middle class (H)	3.75	4.90	8.98	10.30	12.53
Total (Urban + Rural)					
Up to 35,000 (Lower)	58.84	58.16	44.75	42.49	39.66
35,001-70,000 (Lower middle)	26.95	25.42	32.61	33.53	34.53
70,001-105,000 (Middle)	10.11	10.35	12.89	13.35	13.89
105,001-140,000 (Upper middle)	2.66	3.74	5.46	5.80	6.22
> 140,000 (High)	1.44	2.33	4.29	4.83	5.70
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Broadest middle class (M+UM+H)	14.21	16.42	22.64	23.98	25.81
Expanded middle class (UM+H)	4.10	6.07	9.75	10.63	11.92
Elite middle class (H)	1.44	2.33	4.29	4.83	5.70
Estimated class composition of the Indian population; Deshpande (2003) based on Monthly per capita consumption expenditure data, NSSO 1999-2000					
Description of class	Rural India			Urban India	
	Monthly per capita expenditure (Rs.)	% of population		Monthly per capita expenditure (Rs.)	% of population
Below poverty line	< 329	34.4		<458	29.6
Above poverty line (next 4 classes)	329-470	33.8		458-775	36.9
Less poor (next 4 classes)	470-775	24.7		775-1,500	25.9
Non poor (top 2 classes)	>775	7.0		>1,500	7.6

Source: Sridharan (2004: 412); Deshpande (2003: 135)

²⁶ Using the NSSO data, he estimates that about a third of the population qualifies for middle class status. But juxtaposing this figure with data on possession of consumer durables he concludes that the number drastically reduces to ten to fifteen percent.

Another factor contributing to the exclusivity of the middle class is the limitation of its membership to an upper caste, English-speaking constituency. It cannot be denied that the social identity of the middle class is predominantly upper caste, right from the colonial times to the contemporary liberalising era. Postcolonial development strategies did not efface caste hierarchies but simply displaced them onto an urban social order based on class difference. A peculiar caste-class linkage was forged in which lower castes and ethnic minorities are disproportionately clustered in lower class rungs of the society, while the middle and the upper classes drew on members of the upper castes (Fernandes 2006; Nair 2006).

Not everyone is convinced by this direct correlation between caste and class where upper caste translates into upper class and lower caste into lower class. Some insist that the translation of caste into class is more complex than acknowledged. For example, Beteille (2001) believes that the Indian middle class plays a leading part in undermining traditional attitudes towards caste and gender, a point picked up by Guru (2001) as he subscribes to the view that the middle class is potentially a source of liberation for traditionally oppressed groups such as the dalits.²⁷ Sheth (1996) uses empirical data to show that there is increasing penetration of the non-traditional caste groups into the middle class and estimates that half of the middle class consists of groups drawn from the Other Backward Classes (OBCs), religious minorities, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. On the contrary, Deshpande (2006: 231) disaggregates NSSO data (round 55, 1999-2000) and finds that 'upper caste Hindus, who form only about 37 per cent of the urban population, are almost two-thirds of

²⁷ This perception stems from the traditional portrayal of the middle class as a category whose membership is based on acquired virtues such as merit, excellence and efficiency rather than ascribed attributes of caste, religion, ethnicity or language. The middle class here is seen as one promoting secular universal attributes embodied in modernity. This is of course easily contested in India where the secular leanings of the middle class are a thing of the past as it displays clearer affinity towards Hindu nationalist imaginings of the nation (Dutta 2006; Joshi 2001; Vanaik 2004). Today, the general argument is that the upper-caste middle class constitutes the core support group of the BJP, and since the 1989 General Election, the rise of the Indian middle class complements the rise of the BJP (Malik and Singh 1992; Basu 1996)

the Top 5 per cent of urban India', and 'in rural India, the UC [upper caste] Hindus are over-represented among the top 5 per cent by a factor of two, that is, their share of the affluent elite is twice their share in the general population'.

While the debate still persists on whether the middle class has actually diversified, what is clear is that the 'old' urban middle class has taken an increasingly elitist stand against the challenges posed by the rising number of 'new' vernacular middle class members in rural and small town India outside the traditional bastion of cities. The aversion of the former to the latter particularly draws on the non-anglicised nature of these new aspirants, and it relies on the English language to secure its dominant status. English is traditionally the medium of communication for the Indian middle class to build a rapport with the ruling elite, which also serves to alienate the large mass of non-English speaking indigenous social groups (Fernandes 2006; Rajagopal 1999; Roy 1993). In a globalising context, English is even more critical for the middle class to access the new employment opportunities, one that they are anxious to protect and monopolise.²⁸

A pretentious exaggeration?

Not all scholars endorse the perception of the middle class as elite or dominant social group, arguing instead that the middle class only wields an indirect influence on state policies. That is, while the middle class may have an undue sway on the political process, they are not able to dominate it (Dutta 2006). The very notion of a westernised middle class developing as an elite category during the colonial times has been challenged in the 1970s by the work of Cambridge School of historians. They believed that the western educated urban middle class controlled relatively few means of production and hence possessed relatively little economic power in the Indian cities (Washbrook

²⁸ Most of these opportunities are in the IT (information technology) and BPO (business process outsourcing) sectors, providing skilled services to global companies. Medium of communication is English and fluency in the language is a must for any middle class member aspiring for a job in this sector.

1973, cited in Torre 1990). Rather, the growing middle class during the period of Indian nationalism was not part of the political elite but was a mere broker or intermediary between the Indian notables and the British Raj. This makes it difficult to understand why this “intermediate strata” can be considered a central element in the history of India during the nationalist era.

Related to this, Fernandes and Heller (2006) drawing on Bardhan (2004), add that the bourgeoisie never really achieved hegemonic status in India. According to this view, a classic bourgeois revolution was not possible. In the ensuing passive revolution, the hegemonic bloc could only take a coalitional form, with no single class being strong enough to claim hegemonic status on its own. These authors stress that even though the middle class played a pivotal role within the ruling hegemonic bloc, it has not been able to consolidate hegemonic power. As the political logic of passive revolution proved impossible in an electoral democracy, and despite there being specific forms of mutual dependencies between the state, the political economy and the middle class, the state was never fully “captured” by the middle class. The middle class, in this context, has only been able to assert rather than consolidate hegemony (Fernandes 2006).

Nevertheless, Fernandes and Heller (2006) do not deny the central role played by at least the dominant fraction of the middle class in the politics of hegemony. They revert to the popular argument of the middle class’s influential role in catering to the functional requirements of extended state management. The issue of whether the middle class are an elite social group is best resolved by Deshpande (2003) who summarises its importance by highlighting three crucial aspects of the postcolonial middle class: Firstly, the middle class is that which articulates the hegemony of the ruling bloc, serving as a link or a connection between this bloc and other classes. Secondly, the middle class as a rule are owners of cultural capital. And thirdly, and most importantly, as an increasingly differentiated class, the middle class specialises in the production and dissemination of ideologies. Its elite fraction specialises

in the production of ideologies while its mass fraction engages in their exemplary consumption, all of which invests them with social legitimacy. Paralleling the debates on the middle class's elite nature and of more usefulness, at least to this research, is the speculation about its bourgeois tendency, an assumption that is considered critical to its development as an elite category. This requires careful examination, addressing not just the question of what it means to be bourgeois, but also to what extent does it influence the middle class's elitist predilections.

2.2.3 Bourgeois afflictions

Even before one sets off to engage with the bourgeois characteristics of the middle class, it is useful to note that the term 'bourgeois' is equally as elusive as the 'middle class'. It is attractive as a concept but does not correlate in precision. Historically, the bourgeoisie was in simple terms referred to as the middle class, somewhere between the land owning class and the working class, defined by their position of wealth, independence and non-manual work (Haupt 2001). Emphasising that the notion of a bourgeois cannot be restricted to the upper strata of society, Haupt (2001) applies it to describe all those who are citizens, inhabitants of a town who participate in the bourgeois culture of rational and legal principles, the free market, functioning public opinion and the limitation of state power. And according to him, it was in the *middle* of the society that one could find most of the bourgeois values: 'wealth, self-accomplishment, energy on one hand, but also moderation against revolution, civility against anarchy and aristocratic egoism, and work against leisure' (2001: 59).²⁹ But as the bourgeoisie came to be associated with norms and values not compatible with democratic society, and as the middle class was nurtured in liberal thinking and moderation, the former was soon replaced in public discourse by the latter.

²⁹ This is very similar to Adam Smith's conception of economic man who is a self-seeker of money, fortunes and values of possessive individualism, and who believes in private vices and public virtues.

Kocka (1995) though tends to use the two terms interchangeably, and concedes that “middle class” is usually broader than “bourgeoisie” in that it reaches further down into the “petit bourgeoisie” and more narrow in that it may exclude parts of the elites. While he argues that “bourgeois” lends itself more to critical, political, and polemical usage than the more neutral “middle class”, Pinches (1999: 42) clarifies that such terms are all cultural constructions located within a world that is being explored and problematised. He explains that when

the terms “middle class” and “bourgeoisie” were popularised in industrialising Europe, they represented an attempt to apprehend and label the emergence of powerful new social forces which challenged the feudal order of estates and aristocratic authority. The two terms were invested with a shifting range of meanings,....reflecting something of the elusiveness and complexity of the phenomenon at hand, as well as the different social vantage points from which it was experienced.

Marxist scholars tend to oscillate between two different positions. On the one hand, some define the bourgeoisie as the class of modern capitalists, as owners of the means of social production and employers of waged labour, thereby relegating the middle-class physicians, lawyers, priests, writers, and scientists into paid-wage labourers (Ahmed 2001). On the other hand, there are some who treat the middle class as an analytic extension of the bourgeoisie or as part of the nascent bourgeoisie (Davis 2004).

Fernandes and Heller (2006) choose to differentiate between the bourgeoisie and the middle class in India. According to them, the strategy of reproduction of the bourgeoisie is driven by the systemic logic of capital accumulation and a structural power that translates into political power in ways that make it less necessary for this class to mobilize visibly and politically in order to reproduce itself. Whereas, the middle class is characterised by a higher degree of structural complexity and uncertainty and exists through itself, that is, through the practices via which it reproduces itself. Alternatively, there are others who argue that the dominant pattern of change in India today is via a bourgeois revolution. This emanates upward from the expanding middle class which reveals the continued and accelerating process of embourgeoisement

(Stern 2003). This can be traced back to the nationalist movement where the middle class doubled up as the bourgeoisie adopting its basic values, and occupying its economic position. In this context, Chatterjee (1986) alleges that it is because of this lack of a clear distinction between the native bourgeoisie and the emerging middle class that the bourgeois opposition to imperialism acquired a dubious character, resulting in the nationalist thought evolving as an elitist discourse. Acknowledgement of this point comes from Nehru himself who admitted that the politics of Indian nationalism was elitist and that of his bourgeois class. Since all vocal politics were those of the middle class (Varma 1999), the middle class thus came to be associated with the non-capitalist bourgeoisie.

2.2.4 Emerging middle class: elite and bourgeois

Speculations about the elitist and bourgeois nature of the middle class gain a heightened status in the context of globalisation and neoliberalisation which enhances the significance of the middle class as technocrats and scientific experts (Zunino 2006). This gives a further fillip to the elitist assumption of an increasingly bourgeois middle class. In India, the middle class is believed to play an influential role in shaping public responses to liberalisation, emerging as an autonomous actor with its own set of interests and political agency. Assuming an increasingly crucial part in the shaping and reproduction of social formations, it also proves to be the new leader and economic dynamo of the twenty-first century world economy (Fernandes 2006).

Many identify the middle class that is associated with this changing political-economic scenario as the 'new' middle class that subscribes increasingly to an elite culture of materialism, individualism and conspicuous consumption, and bears out important social tensions and hegemonic shifts in much of Asia (Pinches 1999). Fernandes (2006) approaches such a portrayal cautiously and warns against idealising the new middle class given the discrepancies between representations of the new middle class identity and the contradictory socioeconomic realities of those who both constitute and aspire

to this group. While she argues that there is a conceptual slippage between the new middle class and the “new rich”, she agrees that the new middle class embodies a changing set of socio-cultural norms for the Indian nation. Its politics signify ‘a complex configuration of symbolic, material, and attitudinal changes that resonate with global discourses on the “new rich in Asia’ (ibid.: 141).³⁰ There is no easy way of resolving such contradictory portrayals, but what is essential and desirable is to undertake a more detailed examination of this ‘new’ category, assessing it for its newness and distinction from the ‘old’ counterparts, and how it contributes increasingly to the interplay of class and power.

2.3 The newness of the ‘new’ middle class

Scholars working on the middle class have a tendency to declare at frequent intervals the rise of a new middle class, emphasising its distinction from its predecessor the old middle class. Barely had the term middle class come into employment in the late eighteenth century, to refer to the propertied and largely entrepreneurial class located between landowners on the one hand and the urban-industrial workers and agricultural labourers on the other, when observers identified a sense of inadequacy with the term (Abercrombie and Urry 1983). By the end of the nineteenth century, Kautsky is known to have identified the new middle class in reference to the rise of the salaried class with the industrial revolution in Europe (Carter 1985). Wacquant (1991) traces it to Gustav Schmoller and the German “revisionism” of the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century differentiating them from the old middle class or the petty bourgeoisie comprising of craftsmen and shopkeepers. According to Giddens (1973), the new middle class comprised of a category of people who possessed educational privileges and were recruited by the bourgeoisie wishing to slough off clerical duties. They came to represent the propertyless white-collar worker associated with salaried employment. Unlike the old middle class

³⁰ Fernandes’s (2006) jibe is against scholars like Robison and Goodman (1996) whose equate the new middle class in East and Southeast Asia with the new rich.

which was able to create its independent existence and identity through small business, occupied a position outside the polarised class structure, possessed attributes neither of the capitalist or the worker, and played little part in the capital accumulation process, the new middle class of the industrial revolution era occupied an intermediary position and took its characteristic from both sides (Singh 1985).

Abercrombie and Urry (1983) in reflecting on the newness of the new middle class emphasise that it is incorrect to treat the present category as a direct descendent of the eighteenth- or nineteenth-century variants. Rather, the new middle class today is a result of the development of the global functions of capital where despite not owning capital legally, it acts jointly with the capitalists to perform related functions. At the same time, the authors clarify that the new middle class is a continuously transforming social group, changing as a result of adjustment in the employment profile, and evolving as the character of capitalism changes (from merchant to industrial to fordist, post-fordist, flexible, advanced, etc.). While this may be generalised for advanced industrial societies, their evolution in late-developing nations took a different trajectory, resulting in a middle class not dissimilar yet quite specific to its circumstances. This is best illustrated by examining the rise of the middle class in India and tracing its spoor as it branched out from the 'old' to the 'new'.

2.3.1 'Old' to the 'new': evolution of the Indian middle class

The Indian middle class is generally understood to be a colonial construction when a loyal, subservient class was created to act as intermediaries between the colonial state and the local society (Misra 1961; Joshi 2000; Fernandes 2006). This is based on an assumption that prior to this, there was no middle class in India. Scholars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries believed that European and "Oriental" societies were differentiated precisely by the absence

of a “middle estate” in the latter (Markovits 2001).³¹ In the case of India, both Marx and Weber subscribed to the view that given the hereditary division of labour that functioned under an entrenched caste system and the absence of a fully developed capitalism, the development of a class structure of modern society was impossible. It took colonialism to create conditions conducive for the birth of a ‘modern’ middle class when its members sought to import the ideas and institutions of a middle-class order into India for assistance in colonial administration.

Thus, this fresh class, that Marx (2001 [1853]) noticed amongst the Indian natives imbued with ideas of European science, was soon drawing on the lessons of Renaissance, Reformation and Enlightenment to usher in a new politics of representation, novel constructions of womanhood, and transformation of religious practices. Its members promoted temperance and thrift, curtailment of wasteful expenses on rituals and marriages, and encouraged investment in productive business enterprises as well as their communities to seek higher educational qualifications (Joshi 2001). But the middle class was eventually not content with social reformation, and soon it diverged into a new terrain involving the imagination and mobilisation of a new form of nationalism.

From the 1870s onwards, the middle class began to establish some kind of national leadership culminating in the formation of the Indian National Congress (INC) in 1885 – representing the forefront of the Indian struggle for

³¹ Markovits (2001: 43) explains that ‘[r]ecognising the existence of an Indian middle class would have amounted to acknowledging a certain degree of similarity between the English and Indian societies which would have endangered the colonial project itself’. In contrast to Misra’s (1961) position that merchant capitalism which existed in the Mughal period in a well developed form did not abet middle class elements in becoming a stratified order as they remained divided into watertight caste-based status groups, Khan (1976) makes a more positive case for studying the mercantile and professional groups in the Mughal Empire amidst hopes that this would reveal something about the origins of the modern Indian middle class. Bayly (1983, cited in Joshi 2001) contests that as far as the Indian middle class is concerned their politics that emerged in the colonial period were shaped to a large extent by precolonial “mentalities”, to which Joshi (2001) responds that “civil society” and “public sphere”, the two essential characteristics of a modern middle class were not enshrined in the ideological template of precolonial India.

independence (Sarkar 1983). Steeped in the value of bourgeois liberalism, the 'educated middle-class elite, which provided all the leaders of the National movement, came to oppose British rule in the name of the most advanced bourgeois democracy, represented by Britain itself' (Vanaik 1990: 72; Chatterjee 1993). Even as the nationalist movement evolved and expanded to a mass level and incorporated other social groups, including the peasantry, it was the middle class that took much of the credit for steering the country into independence.

But this legacy of the colonial middle class entering India's postcolonial era lasted only through the Nehruvian era when the state policies provided it with a free rein. The middle class, monopolising the state machinery, held the state on a tight leash. This served to perpetuate a pseudo policy of socialist rhetoric which seemed to insist that the state was rightly biased in favour of the less privileged while in reality it served best the interests of the middle class and the elite. Nehru's emphasis on scientifically planned development had surely laid power in the hands of the educated middle class but their policies had achieved little in terms of economic growth or redistributive justice.³² In the post-Nehruvian period there was a clear shift as his successor and daughter Indira Gandhi changed the way the politics of the Indian state operated, after which it centred on the personality and authority of a charismatic and unquestioned leader. After nearly losing the elections of 1967, Gandhi recognised the need to build a direct relationship with the rural and urban poor with populist promises that deinstitutionalised the state and sidelined the recommendations and strategies of the centralised planning committees. Through powerful slogans like '*garibi hatao*' (abolish poverty) she built a new form of populism where state welfare was reduced to the level

³² The annual economic growth rate in the 1960s stagnated at a low level of 3.7 percent (1.5 percent in terms of per capita), and was popularly known as the 'Hindu rate of growth'.

of manoeuvre and tactic, establishing a direct system of patronage and machine politics with the deprived classes.³³

By the 1980s, the pervasive “politics without administration” syndrome had produced the spectacle of political anarchy and deepened the crisis of political and economic institutions within the state system. Faced with a marauding breed of political elites who had come to represent the “criminalisation of politics” (Singh 1990), the political identity of middle class activity was shaped by a sense of state failure in delivering its promises (Fernandes 2006; Figure 4). A dominant perception at this time was of a middle class (including those comprising the state machinery) left in the lurch by an unreliable state which had chosen to engage directly with the masses, striking deals in exchange for electoral gains (Varma 1999). The result of this was the anticipation of a disappearing middle class, akin to Dahrendorf’s (1959) view that in a crisis situation, an intermediate position just does not exist, rather what exists are two middle classes; one part of the capitalists and the other part of the working class.³⁴

³³ There are several scholarly works analysing Indira Gandhi’s style of politics. See, for instance, Rudolph and Rudolph, 1987; Malik and Vajpeyi, 1988; Stern, 2003; Corbridge and Harriss, 2001.

³⁴ The “disappearing middle class” thesis was quite popular in the western world from the 1980s onwards when Bluestone and Harrison (1982) speculated about a disappearing middle class amidst increasing income inequality and socio-economic polarisation in the post-industrial era. The rise of the global city literature in the 1990s gave further credence to this position as it was argued that that industrial and occupational restructuring resulted in the expansion of high-paying and low-paying jobs at the expense of a disappearing middle class. This is now a highly contested debate, for a summary of which see Nørgaard (2003).

Figure 4: RK Laxman, *The Times of India* on the Indian middle class hit by harsh state policies and “criminalisation of politics”



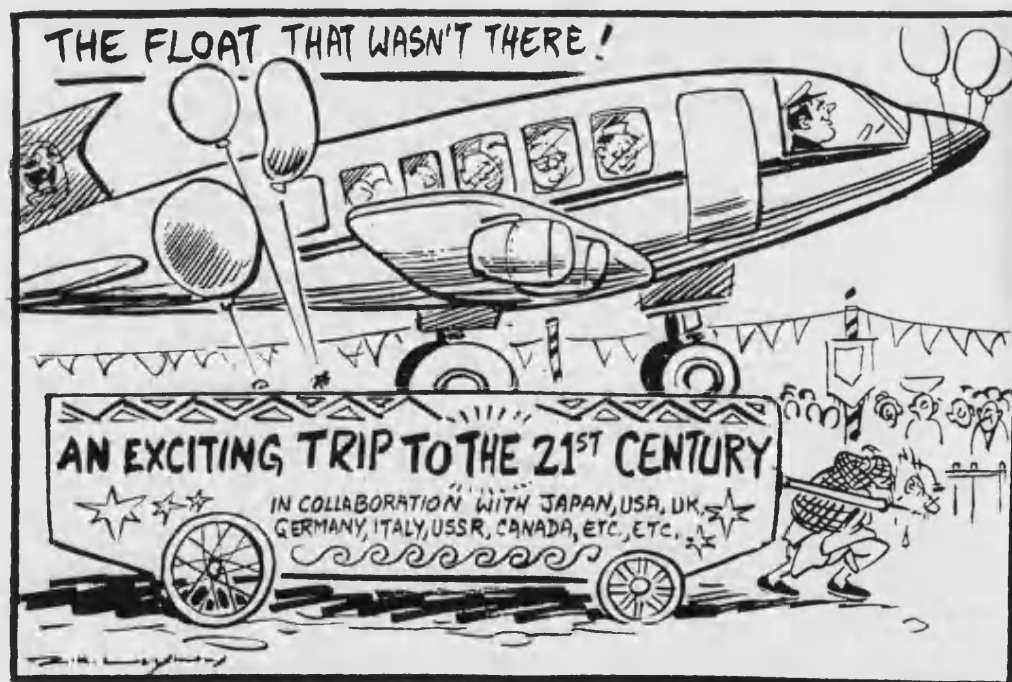
The one on the left is a politician-turned-gangster and on the right is the gangster-turned-politician!

Source: Top – Laxman (2005: 76); Bottom – Laxman (2000: 198)

But just as the idea of a vanishing Indian middle class was being assimilated, the situation reversed in the mid-1980s with the change of political leadership at the Centre. Following the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984, her son Rajiv Gandhi came to power and, in direct contrast to his mother's populist appeals to the masses, openly sought the support of the middle class acknowledging its economic and political clout:

The Rajiv era (1984-88) of Indian politics witnessed once again the romantic liaison of Indian middle classes with politics. What was earlier considered as an arena of populist vulnerability where the lay public mattered more than the "informed" middle classes was reversed with the ushering in of technocrat-politicians whose onus was on technological development, and instead of "welfare", development symbolised a gateway to the "twenty first century". This style of politics gained the admiration of the Indian middle classes. (Palshikar 2001: 172; Figure 5)³⁵

Figure 5: RK Laxman, *The Times of India* on Rajiv Gandhi's promise for the twenty-first century



Source: Laxman (2005: 112)

³⁵ In this sense, Rajiv Gandhi's flirtation with the Indian middle class was closer to his grandfather Nehru's relationship with this social class than his mother's.

The liberalised policies of Rajiv Gandhi's government introduced economic reforms in the 1985 Budget. This included changes in taxation and policies on consumer goods, the benefits of which accrued to the professional middle class, now reborn as the consumer (Lakha 1999; Dutta 2006). This 'marked a political process in which the state began to identify the middle class as a distinctive group with its own political and economic interests that needed to be consciously addressed through governmental policy and rhetoric', and 'a new understanding of the middle class that rested on specific linkages between middle-class aspirations, consumption practices, and policies of economic reform' (Fernandes 2006: 38). With the formal launch of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1991 broadly based on the tenets of neoliberalism, the metamorphosis into a new middle class was complete, marking a distinctive shift in contemporary Indian politics, as it set about renegotiating its relationship with the state and a wide array of non-state actors made relevant by the forces of globalisation and neoliberalisation.

2.3.2 New and neoliberal

It is an uncontested statement today that the Indian middle class is the immediate beneficiary of globalised commerce ushered into the country by neoliberalisation. The expansion of the service sector and of professional, white-collar, private sector employment paved the way for the rise of a new Indian middle class, who now occupy important positions in many transnational companies. Fernandes (2006: xx) explains that at the structural level the new middle class does not refer to new entrants to middle-class status, but rather is defined by a change in the status of jobs, which now signify the upper tiers of middle-class employment. In symbolic terms, if 'the cultural and economic standard for the "old middle class" would have been represented by a

job in a state bank or the Indian civil service, today, the members of the new middle class aspire to jobs in multinational corporations or foreign banks'.³⁶

At the same time, Fernandes (2006) cautions against portraying the new middle class as an outgrowth that is simply defined by contemporary globalisation and neoliberalisation. According to her, while its newness is definitely characterised by the ways in which this class has sought to redefine middle-class identity through the language of liberalisation, not all members of the new middle class have benefited from liberalisation which has had uneven and contradictory socioeconomic effects on middle-class employment, including increasing job insecurity, employment of contract workers and sharp distinctions in income between different segments.

Sridharan (2004) questions Kohli's (1989) observation that economic reforms offered concrete benefits to the middle class, and that there is a direct, visible structural link between the growing middle class and the booming neoliberal capital market. Through an empirical analysis of the changing profile of middle-class employment between 1990-91 to 2001-02, he calculates that public sector employment has only decreased slightly in the post-reform period, from 19.06 million to 18.88 million, while private sector employment has only increased slightly from 7.676 million to 8.432 million. He also estimates that the livelihood of 67 percent of the broader middle class depends on either state employment or state subsidies. In this regard, responding to the suggestion that the new middle class constitutes only the small dominant fraction of the middle class, and that it 'is still in an emerging relationship with traditional segments of the middle class that are still largely dependent on state employment' (Fernandes 2006: xxvi), Fernandes and Heller (2006) also clarify that it has nevertheless become the standard against which the aspirations of other fractions of the middle class are measured. Thus, the implications of this

³⁶ This is not the only way of distinguishing between the old and the new middle class, as an earlier section in this chapter used it to differentiate between the more elitist urban members and the vernacular aspirants. But since this thesis focuses on the urban middle class, it will use Fernandes's (2000a; 2006) distinction on the basis of employment profile.

identity are much broader, with the new middle class presented as an idealised standard for an Indian nation that is finally competing in a global economy. This is similar to an earlier argument in this chapter about the elite nature of the Indian middle class where it became clear that while only a small fraction of the middle class constitutes the elite, it is an identity that the larger mass of the 'regular' middle class aspires to and tries to reproduce.

Such observations apart, scholars unanimously acknowledge that analysing the new middle class is crucial to our understanding of the political dynamics of economic reform in contemporary India (Fernandes 2006; Sridharan 2004; Fernandes and Heller 2006; Deshpande 2006, 2003). Sridharan (2004) engages in a more careful reading of the relationship between the new middle class and liberalisation, and finds that there is no clear sign of an ideological shift amongst the middle class in favour of liberalisation, but acknowledges that the new economic phenomenon offers its members opportunities that represent an attitudinal change towards life (also see Ganguly-Scrase 2003; Scrase 2006). The work culture that has evolved around the new economy fosters an image of an employee that is far removed from any concept of a labouring self, emphasising work as a lifestyle, and whose goal is enhanced consumption (Nair 2006). Members of the new middle class with their new found affluence (via their strategic position in the 'new' economy) can thus indulge in lifestyles that clearly focus on improving their material well-being and their status (Embong 2001a). In fact, it is through these highly publicised *consumption* choices that the new middle class is gaining popularity and notoriety.

2.3.3 Conspicuous consumption

Shortly before his landmark visit to India in 2006, the US President George W Bush addressed members of the Asia Society in Washington DC where he identified the growing affluence of India as a potential market for American goods and services:

India's middle class is now estimated at 300 million people. Think about that. That's greater than the entire population of the United States. India's middle class is buying air-conditioners, kitchen appliances, and washing machines, and a lot of them from American companies like GE, and Whirlpool, and Westinghouse. And that means their job base is growing here in the United States of America...Today India's consumers associate American brands with quality and value, and this trade is creating opportunity here at home.³⁷

His statement comes amidst a growing interest in the new middle class in Asia whose depiction as the consuming class has reached almost cargo-cult proportions in the West. This is largely because they offer new markets for Western products especially at a moment of prolonged recession and low growth rates in the West. So much so that the new middle class has come to be viewed only via a plethora of consumption images (Pinches 1999; Figures 6 and 7).

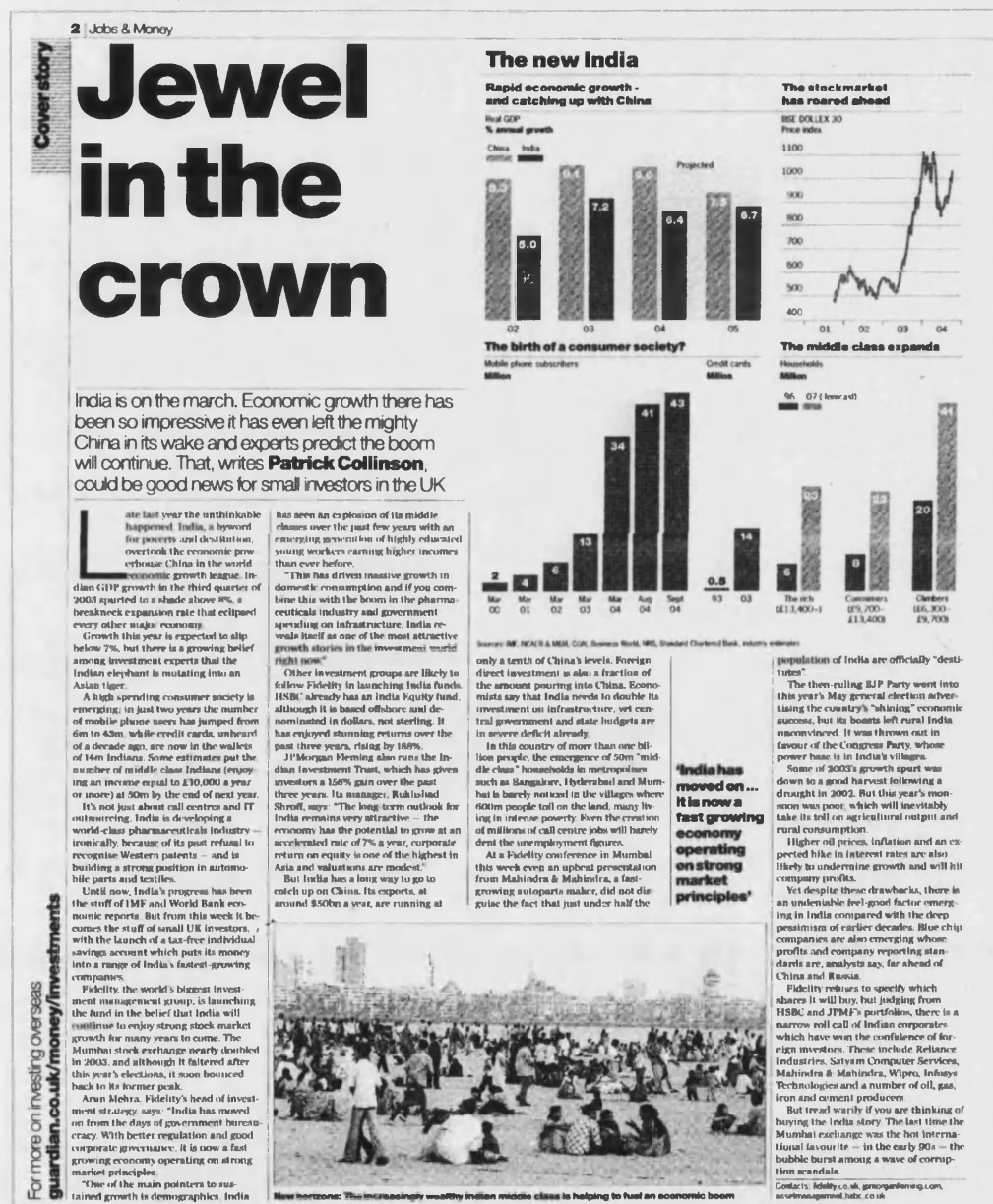
Figure 6: RK Laxman, *The Times of India* on global consumer products flooding the Indian market



Source: Laxman (2005: 181)

³⁷ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/02/20060222-2.html>. Retrieved 13 March, 2008. See also Gentlemen, A. (2006, 26 February). Booming India finds that America wants to be its new best friend. *The Observer*, Retrieved 13 March, 2008.

Figure 7: Is India the new China? Jewel in the crown, *The Guardian*, 09 October, 2004 (Patrick Collinson)



This cover story optimistically relates the expansion of the Indian middle class with the birth of a consumer society, and its role in fuelling the country's economic boom. In contrast is Laxman's (2005) tongue-in-cheek cartoon (Figure 6) which locates the onslaught of global consumer products within an impoverished context.

In India, scholars though have applied brakes to unabashed portrayals of the new middle class as the global consumer class by assessing their ability to consume in real numbers. Early in the 1990s, the National Council for Applied Economic Research (NCAER) started undertaking surveys to quantify this

growing social category and what it meant for the consumer market. In 1991 it calculated the size of the middle class to be around 275-300 million people, and predicted that it would reach 312.4 million in 2001 and 520.5 million by 2007 (Dutta 2006). Were this trend relevant still today nearly half of India would comprise of middle-class households. But Sridharan's (2004) more recent estimate finds the middle class to be somewhere between 55 to 250 million (at its most elite form to the broadest definitional level).

Using the Indian Market Demographics Report 1998, Deshpande (2003: 138) argues that 'there is little room for extravagant estimates of the size of the middle class when less than 8 per cent of Indian households possessed a colour TV set in 1995-96; less than 9 per cent possessed a refrigerator; and only 6 per cent owned a scooter. Even a pressure cooker was owned by only about 25 per cent of households'. He thus argues that while the middle class may be very large in terms of absolute numbers, it is still a small proportion of the Indian population. This is similar to Nijman's (2006: 773, emphasis original) conclusion that the rise of a "great middle class" is exaggerated and misplaced in as far as 'the main actual change concerns upwards shifts *within* the middle class, and are in no small part based on credit-driven consumption rather than on structural and wide-ranging transformations of the economy and labor market' (Table 2).

Table 2: Estimates of Indian middle class consumption

Possession of consumer durables by Indian households; Deshpande (2003) based on NCAER, India Market Demographics Report 1998			
Consumer durable item	Rural India 1995-96 (%)	Urban India 1995-96 (%)	All India 1995-96 (%)
Bicycle	52.9	48.6	51.7
Scooter	2.1	15.9	6.0
Motorcycle	1.9	5.6	2.9
Pressure cooker	13.0	56.3	25.3
Mixer/Grinder	3.1	30.1	10.8
Refrigerator	2.0	25.2	8.6
B&W TV set	15.4	45.6	24.0
Colour TV set	2.6	21.2	7.9
Washing machine	0.5	10.9	3.5
India's 'consuming classes' in 2003 and as projected for 2013, in millions of households; Nijman (2006) based on NCAER 2003			
Social classification (Income in Rs.)	2003		2013
Very rich (>140,000)	3		11
Consumers (105-140,000)	46		124
Climbers (70-105,000)	74		79
Aspirants (35-70,000)	33		9
Destitutes (<35,000)	24		8
Note: Nijman (2006) dismisses the above estimate as a marketing fantasia			

Nevertheless it is equally difficult to dismiss the significance of the new Indian middle class based on such findings. Irrespective of its actual capacity to consume, what is *real* is its fascination with the imagery of consumption which it uses effectively to hold no longer a middling position but a central and normative one (Dutta 2006). Consumerism, rather than production, is the principal arena in which social relations and identities are constructed (Pinches 1999), or as Gupta puts it simply, [i]n the age of globalisation, the consumer is the king while the producer has been put out to pasture' (2000: 78). Moreover, it is through its appetite for consumption that the middle class asserts itself as a more powerful economic proposition than the "very rich", and even though statistically this doesn't seem so, 'it is through consumerism that the middle class *aspires* to be hegemonic' (Dutta 2006: 270, emphasis original). Thus, while Deshpande (2003) feels that the "consumer-segment" definition of the middle class is too narrow to capture the critical and multidimensional role of

the middle class in postcolonial societies, Pinches (1999) and Fernandes (2006) differ by explaining that the consumption patterns of the middle class in cultural terms reveal greater understanding of the hegemonic positions they have come to assume.

If hegemony (which is supposed to have eluded the old middle class and its ruling coalition) is now reconceptualised in a world of consumption, it is partly due to the fact that the infallibility of professional distinctions that the middle class relied on to distinguish themselves has begun to falter. As a result there is a logical extension of the struggle for distinction into consumption practices (Munt 1994; Bourdieu 1984). Their evolution into a consuming class produces a hegemonic classificatory struggle founded on taste and “high culture” which generates consensus among the elite and the middle class rather than across the whole spectrum of social classes. Fernandes and Heller (2006) thus note that consumer sovereignty reproduces and intensifies social differentiation with the new middle class adopting strategies of exclusion to seek and protect their commodities.

Prominent amongst these is the way the new middle class has appropriated the discourse of citizenship, to legitimise their consumption codes and practices, and extend them to wider moral dispositions. It symbolises a visible shift from social to market citizenship or what is popularly known as consumer-citizenship with never-seen-before kinds of power made available through consumption.³⁸ What follows is a dynamic tension between consumerism and citizenship where the redistributive politics of social citizenship exists in tension with the aestheticisation of politics, drawing on its idiom and rhetoric while being threatened with co-optation by it (Rajagopal 1999). Unlike Gupta’s (2000) suggestion that consumerism creates an ideology that undermines citizenship, the relationship between Indian middle class consumers and citizenship is best brought out by Stern (2003) when he states

³⁸ Rather than the polarised distinction between a ‘public’ citizen and a ‘private’ consumer, the consumer-citizen yokes the two together to valorise him- or herself as well as think of the greater good of the greater number (Christopherson 1994; Miller 2000)

that for the Indian bourgeois, a perquisite of Indian citizenship is privileged access to consumer markets, one that is largely a privilege of the middle class. It is not just the new found appetite of the middle class for consumption that brings attention to their employment of a citizenship discourse, but as Kessler (2001: 44) clarifies:

..discussion of the middle class does not serve simply to enable specialist sociologists to develop more technically satisfying forms of class theory and analysis; rather....the discussion of middle-class culture and character provide the indispensable foundation for moving the old nationalist debate forward to some ground upon which its central issue may be resolved....Understanding the complexity of middle-class political psychology and consciousness, and the management within the practices of civility and the “civil consciousness” of the modern citizen, is more than a theoretical problem in social theory.

While the empirical chapters will examine in detail the middle class role play as consumer-citizens, at this point, it would be useful to engage more with the general ideology of citizenship as understood and applied by the middle class, as it is based on this that their recent claims of consumer-citizenship are constructed.

2.4 Debunking some myths about citizenship

A characteristic feature of the modernisation theory that emerged in the 1950s and 1960s is the emphasis of the critical role of middle class not just to development but to democracy as well. Here the conquest of economic development, participatory democracy, and public morality is seen as the culmination of a long road of bourgeois empowerment (Lipset 1959; Rostow 1959). The conviction was that:

as a country undergoes modernisation and as the middle class develops, there is a greater tendency towards universalism and democracy...The European birth into modernity was the case of the rise of capitalism and a middle class whose mission was to oppose the aristocratic feudal state and to democratise society. Not beholden to the state in terms of its power and wealth, it was a heroic class championing democracy and freedom from feudal fetters. (Embong 2001a: 15-16)

This understanding permeated at the political level, when in the late 1950s the state believed that the middle class by initiating a process of modernisation and democratic deepening was critical to the country's exit from "backwardness". It was also prevalent in policy documents circulated by powerful international organisations such as the World Bank where it was argued that middle-class consensus is crucial not just for ideal growth and development but also for democracy, political stability, and "modern" sectoral structure (Easterly 2000).

It is therefore no surprise that in the 1990s a sense of euphoria surrounded the rise of the new middle class in east and southeast Asia amidst the pro-democracy political transformations. Embodying universal interests that are rational, democratic, secular and concerned with the rule of law, the new middle class was considered crucial to the creation of a liberal Asia. Credited with introducing the rights of citizenship and property in a traditionally hierarchical and status-bound society, the growth of the middle-class led civil society organisations was deemed important to creating spaces for democratic participation and discourses on affairs of society. But this jubilation was short-lived as it became apparent that these 'middle class revolts' did not usher in an era of liberal democracy, and the "middle-class-as-democratising-force" thesis has come to be viewed as a faulty one (Oehler 2001).

Jones (1998) questions linking the inexorable rise of bourgeois democracy and civil society to a self-confident middle class, and wonders if they played a significant role in terminating an "authoritarian cycle" of rule in South Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia and Singapore. Even Embong (2001a) who highlighted the role of the middle class in effecting change and democratisation, concedes that it was probably more the fear of economic failure and monetary instability triggered by the financial crisis that forced the middle class to deepen their struggle for further democratisation. Given this, the question of whether a middle class can be considered as a key player in the expansion of the democratic space in the political sphere.

In an unpredictable stance of political fluctuation, the middle class often operate both as democratising agents as well as supporters of authoritarian rule (Jones 1998). The democratic attitudes of the Indian middle class have been found on many occasions to be less than strong as they unashamedly supported the illiberal authoritarian politics of Indira Gandhi when she imposed Emergency Rule in 1975 (Varma 1999). Historically, middle-class interventions have mostly resulted in what are simple transitions to new dictatorships rather than liberal watersheds, where fearing mass radical movements and social chaos, the middle class in many instances chooses authoritarianism as a safer option (Robison and Goodman 1996).

2.4.1 Vacillating between absent societies and active citizenry

This uncertainty about their role as agents of democracy also raises the question of whether there is a distinguishable middle-class polity at all, a possibility that is often dismissed by Marxist scholars. This is evident in Mills's (1951) disdainful depiction of the middle class as an "occupational salad" who are politically homeless or "rearguarders", and who by being unfocused, confused and discontinuous in their actions vacillate in their opinions more often than not. The political orientation of the middle class is restrained by the structural position of its members between labour and capital, and despite its growing presence, it comes across as a fundamentally unstable grouping possessing neither the will nor the power to transform society. Seen as a non-labouring class with little political significance, and no material gains to be had by subscribing to a middle-class identity, it is presumed that the middle class live in a way where their individual lives intersect with class structures only at certain specific moments.

Kessler (2001) describes this condition best when he narrates a middle-class life of oscillation between prolonged periods of disinterested public concern broken by short moments of active citizenship. He explains that the middle class are in general, private, prudent, circumspect, and reluctant to stick

their heads up. Only when the outlook is favourable, safe and possible do they choose to display “civil courage” and public spiritedness which quickly evaporates when the situation turns dangerous. Its members lack ‘impersonal civility and disinterested consideration where one citizen not merely owes, but actually enjoys extending to and finding reciprocated by another citizen, purely on the grounds of a recognition of common citizenship’ (ibid.: 43). Politically timid, passive and conformist for most times, the middle class only transforms into a politically assertive social group and shifts to radical action when they feel the need to protect the bases of their social and economic position, namely, capital, contracts and property. One thus confronts a condition where the middle-class members swing in their attitude towards the nation and society, resulting in an illiberal political expression where political indifference is mixed with high anxiety (Jones 1998).

2.4.2 Apolitical citizens

This tendency of the middle class to switch between the extremes of action and inaction prompts some like Saravanamuttu (2001) to wonder if there is a politics which typifies the concerns of the middle class. His question is set amidst his observation that very often active political actors championing for democracy, human rights, environmental awareness, and all relevant socio-political issues are frequently members of the middle class. And yet, if politics means an active pursuit of social and other objectives through visible and clearly identifiable means to affect political outcomes, then, he believes that, middle-class groups are incapable of championing such politics as they do not constitute a unified category of social interest and action.³⁹ Appadurai (2000b) indulges in a similar speculation when he narrates, in the case of Mumbai, extraordinary displays of courage and critical imagination after the 1992-93

³⁹ A prominent example is the *Narmada Bachao Andolan* in India, an environmental movement protesting the construction of the Sardar Sarovar Dam on the Narmada River, and devoted to addressing the problems of the displaced communities (tribals and villagers). Led by Medha Patkar, a charismatic social worker from Mumbai, it is safe to say that its prominent leaders are members of the urban middle class. But at the same time, one cannot conclude that environmental activism is a characteristic feature of the middle class.

riots from housing activists, lawyers, social workers, journalists, architects, and trade union members – middle-class individuals who have held up powerful images of a cosmopolitan, secular, multicultural city. But he still asks with suspicion whether this is all just a playing of ‘the politics of conscience’? (Appadurai 2002: 44). At least, that’s what Palshikar (2001) seems to think when he views new social movements drawing their leadership as well as their intellectual support from sections of the middle class as diffuse and disparate activities through which one can obtain a moral fulfilment without necessarily burning one’s fingers in agitations or without dirtying one’s hands in politics.

Harriss (2006) in this context suggests that this middle-class scorn for politics as a “dirty river” results in their paradoxical preference for political action through a process of “depoliticisation”. Amidst a typical argument that democracy’s representative institutions are undermined by the presence of lower-caste and class groups, or what the middle class refer to as a ‘plebeianisation of democracy’, they shun electoral politics, as they believe that this is the primary process through which the masses make counterclaims on constitutional democracy. But by vacating the sphere of politics and failing to take on roles of political leadership, their scepticism of democracy reveals an increasingly anti-democratic impulse.

Sidelined by the absence of their political participation, they end up as permanent outsiders in the realm of politics (Varma 1999), which compels them, in reaction, to delink important notions like citizenship from what they consider to be a corrupted electoral process. This results in a weakly developed understanding of citizenship, where amidst claims of rescuing Indian democracy from corruption, patronage, and the special interests of rising politically assertive subaltern groups, they construct a model of citizenship ‘that rests on a continued struggle to reclaim the terms of democratic politics from subordinated social groups’ (Fernandes 2006: 182). Hancock’s (1995) work analyses the cultural practices of middle class Brahmins in Madras and illustrates this well as she finds that the notion of common sense or civic sense

as promoted by the middle class is penetrated and reshaped by their upper-caste and upper-class sensibilities. The hegemonic principles of such a citizenship are consistent with class and caste privileges, and are hardly capable of accommodating the often antagonistic interests and idioms associated with different classes and castes. Her participants differentiated between “intelligent” and “unintelligent” citizens, specifying the latter as rural, “common people”. Enumerating the criteria of good citizenship, they indicated the categories of people who were and were not predisposed to it. Not surprisingly, it was the poor, especially the “Backward” and Untouchable groups who had the propensity to succumb to violence and moral depravity.

The previous chapter has already highlighted Chatterjee’s (2004) useful distinction between citizens and populations. In relation to this, he explains that while the former operates in the realm of civil society, the latter do so in the terrain of political society, and that it is only a small section of culturally equipped citizens who claim to represent the high ground of modernity, while populations make instrumental use of the fact that they can vote in elections. Faced with the demands of electoral mobilisation and the logic of welfare distribution, it is the protagonists of civil society and the constitutional state who complain that modernity is facing an unexpected rival in the form of democracy, thereby highlighting a complete disjuncture between modernity and democracy. The suggestion being that while the civil society of ‘respectable’ citizens remains committed to modernity, democracy loses its sheen, usurped and corrupted by political society.

2.4.3 Not really modern either

At stake here is the question of whether the middle class can at least be considered as agents of modernity. While the colonial middle class was initially celebrated as the bearer of modernity with a civilising influence, they were unable to pursue a pure vision of a modern, secular, self-regulating and enlightened civil society against an outright rejection of a privileged, hierarchical, and status-determined traditional society. Instead, they tempered

the modern imaginings of class, gender, national, and religious identities with older ideas about appropriate social relations, resulting in a fractured modernity stitching together the ideas of the traditional and the modern (Joshi 2001). The middle-class idiom of politics employed liberalism and modernity for their own empowerment, setting important limits to their “traditional” prejudices against subordinate social groups. Discovering that the colonial middle class was not egalitarian enough to perceive the lower social orders as equal citizens, Joshi (2001: 175) draws on Hobsbawm (1989) to show that this contradictory behaviour is inherent to the middle class where ideas about representative government, and civil rights and liberties are part of the political vocabulary of the middle class, but only so long as they were “compatible with the rule of law and with the kind of order which kept the poor in their place”, that is, a sense of superiority is central to the constitution of the bourgeois man. But this hasn’t prevented the middle class from frequently claming assaults on modernity as an instrument of citizenship, as seen in the way they have framed their argument against affirmative action policies pursued by the Indian state.

‘Unreserved’ citizenship

The policy of affirmative action or what in common jargon is known as reservation has a long historical trajectory evolving from the early missionary objective of advancement of the underprivileged to a postcolonial political arithmetic strategy. In the initial years after independence, reservation was first routinely implemented and systematised in favour of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (15 percent for the former and 7.5 percent for the latter) in the three fields of education, employment and political representation. But soon demand for reservation arose from other backward classes or the OBCs culminating in the 1980 Mandal Commission Report which recommended that 27 percent of the posts of the public sector be reserved for this group (supposedly comprising 52 percent of the country’s population). It is outside the scope of this thesis to undertake a detailed examination of the politics of reservation in India. This has been successfully dealt with by scholars elsewhere, but the intention here is to focus on the middle-class response to

reservation as it has crucially influenced their invocation of the citizenship discourse.⁴⁰

In 1990, when the VP Singh government decided to implement the recommendations of the Mandal Commission, it unleashed a violent backlash from the upper caste members (mostly students) who feared the loss of employment opportunities and their domination of the socio-political order, provoking the Supreme Court to suspend its implementation. Since then, reservations for the OBCs have been implemented in spurts by different governments (at both the central and state levels) amidst several pro- and anti-reservation debates, the latter spearheaded by the members of the middle class. While at one level the opposition of middle class to the “Mandalisation of politics” is an attempt to keep the aspiring lower castes out of the rather exclusive upper-caste middle class (Sheth 1999), their resistance to reservation is mainly articulated through an emphasis on merit. The (urban) middle class argument is that ‘preferential treatment on the basis of caste rather than qualifications is undermining the principle of merit which in turn has lowered the standard of administration and thus diminished the country’s development prospects’ (Lakha 1999). In the current context of neoliberalisation and the opportunities offered by globalisation, the globally oriented middle class identify meritocracy as an important dimension of their discourse and insist that reservation hinders efficiency of business in a highly competitive and globally networked environment.⁴¹

Such a position eventually calls citizenship to its support, as seen in Beteille’s (1991a, 1991b, 1992, 1999) take on reservation where he argues that

⁴⁰ For a concise review of affirmative action in India see Jaffrelot (2006, 2003); cf. Kumar (1992).

⁴¹ Merit is a historic argument employed by the middle class as it rose in opposition to the privileged aristocratic societies and established a basic affinity between the middle class culture and liberalism based on self-help and achievement (Kocka 1995). After decades of tussling with the reservationists, the discourse of merit is finding newfound significance in a climate of globalisation, where it is equated once again with quality and excellence, features considered essential to be ‘on top of the game’ in a competitive market-oriented global economy.

citizenship and caste are antithetical principles, and that the politics of reservation will prove to be a setback for the exertion of both citizenship and civil society. In a way, this position echoes the general scepticism towards the politics of difference and identity politics, primarily based on their (in)ability to allow a variety of dissenting groups to share a common platform when their positions are often fiercely antagonistic to each other (Mahajan 2002; see also Fraser 1995, 2000; Harvey 1993). As a result of this, doubts are cast over the possibility of Young's (1990) differentiated citizenship in a 'heterogeneous public', especially when there is no 'shared "common heritage" or "way of life" by reference to which citizens' rights can be defined' (Miller 2000: 44).⁴²

But this does not mean that the middle-class subscription to a homogeneous national identity reflects an all-inclusive universalism of the general. In fact, middle-class employment of citizenship has always been viewed with scepticism right from the time of Marx whose own discomfort with citizenship was primarily because of the cultural and social connection of citizenship with middle-class life. He was concerned by their artificial separation between political and society, influencing the way civil society and citizenship were understood. Viewing this as a continuation of class inequality in liberal capitalism, he therefore claimed that citizenship was a smokescreen that masked economic inequalities (Isin and Turner 2002). This led to the general acknowledgement of a contradictory relationship between citizenship and class where modern citizenship became the architect of legitimising social inequality, an aspect that has already been highlighted in the previous chapter.

Lockwood (1996) in emphasising the relevance of the ethos and practice of citizenship amidst class relations elaborates that the middle class generally have an edge on the working class in terms of their ability to get more out of the same formally equal rights, particularly social rights. He argues

⁴² O'Hanlon and Washbrook (1992) raise this question in the Indian context, while in the western scenario, Miller's conservative aspersion focuses on protecting national identities against Young's (1990) politics of difference or even Kymlicka's (1995) multicultural group-differentiated citizenship. The concern here is not the evaluation of the pros and cons of politics of difference but an emphasis of the middle class refusal to subscribe to it.

against underestimating the so-called “prestige-gain” factor of the middle class as they are better able to communicate their needs and are more confident in influencing the choice of options open to them. For instance, when the Constituent Assembly was set up in 1946 to debate and finalise a constitution for independent India, it largely brought together people from the upper and middle class. This document conjured up a notion of citizenship and disseminated it through an educational curriculum available only to the middle and upper classes, while for the lower classes and the poor, citizenship imagined through the legislative forum remained blurry and incomprehensible (Kaviraj 1997).

As the new middle class get increasingly involved in status-enhancing activities in their attempts to become fully distinct socially, they look for different means of enhancing their status, and emphasising their difference from other classes, particularly the lower social groups. In this aspect, issues surrounding status have become central to the concerns of citizenship where status is not just about lifestyle but also involves politico-legal entitlement in the way it invokes citizenship (Turner 1988). With many identifying the emergence of the new middle class in India as a normative political project, it becomes all the more essential to examine their everyday practices which shapes and constitutes the substantive content of citizenship, aspects which constitute the main focus of enquiry of the empirical chapters.

2.5 Conclusion

The narratives of middle class residents interviewed for this research were frequently peppered with references to ‘a typical middle-class attitude’, which is used in a freewheeling manner to represent an entire gamut of expressions ranging from helplessness and despair to criticism and anger. But most of them were unable to explain what they meant by middle class, despite subscribing to it sans reservation or inhibition. It is not just the ordinary middle class members who are unable to pinpoint the exact characteristics of their social group, but also scholars who find themselves inadequate in defining this

elusive category. This chapter addresses this shortcoming, as it undertakes an epistemology and ontology of the middle class, an exercise that is rendered all the more necessary in a post-1989 scenario, where the middle class has come through as an important social category, overcoming its general depiction as a euphemism for classlessness to help establish the relevance of class politics in a cultural landscape.

Dominating its recent focus is the issue of how relevant it is to explaining the recent structural changes due to a globalising 'new' economy, and how influential it is in directing it. Traditionally, in postcolonial societies, the middle class is viewed as an elite social class with bourgeois tendencies, as in India, where the middle class is associated with the running of the state bureaucracy as the non-capitalist bourgeoisie. Speculations about the elitist and bourgeois nature of the middle class are heightened in the context of globalisation and liberalisation as many believe that this is a conducive terrain for the realisation of its hegemonic ideologies. The 'new' middle class that is associated with this change emerges as a politically salient actor, transforming from a class-in-itself to a class-for-itself. It epitomises not just a different relationship with capitalism, but also a cultural shift as consumers of material culture, claiming a clear distinction from its 'old' counterparts.

While recent scholarly work has challenged the rather exaggerated enumeration of the new middle class, what is real is the fascination with the imagery of the new middle class which it uses to create a central and normative position. Integral to this exercise is its appropriation of the discourse of citizenship, as it attempts to retrieve its critical position to democracy and development. In India, the middle class is generally believed to have abandoned their commitment to democracy due to its 'plebeianisation'. Its withdrawal from the electoral process results in an illiberal political expression, where it strives to reframe the notion of citizenship by delinking it from popular politics. This produces a weak and flawed model of citizenship that struggles to reclaim the 'democratic spaces' from the subordinated social

groups, and is disseminated through the middle-class domination of the educational curriculum and the legislative forum. While the intention of this chapter was to establish a clear theoretical understanding of the (Indian) middle class one could take to the field, interviewing the middle class on ground proved in some ways a confirmation of these epistemological/ ontological postulations, and in other ways yielded quite a different understanding of this social category. The next chapter, in this sense, is not a conventional methodology chapter, as it also outlines the experiences of interrogating the middle class which, in a revisionist sense, has influenced the theoretical arguments put forward in this chapter.

3

Methodology: Rigour and rigmarole

In much of the 'new' urban geography, method and methodology are for the most part inconveniences in the world of 'have theory will travel'.....'New' urban geographers.....seldom outline how they have used these methods or their relationship to the theoretical tracts that they follow. In other instances, they make a case for method and methodology but do not then follow this through in their research and writings. (Lees 2003: 107)

If, as Canclini (1995) suggests, the urban sociologist studies the city, and the urban anthropologist studies *in* the city, then we could possibly add that the urban geographer is involved in a combination of both – speaking about the city as well as letting the city speak. For, the human geographer's urban pursuit involves collecting both 'facts' about the city and 'discourses' on the city, where the 'meaning of the city is constituted by what the city gives and what it does not give, by what the subjects can do with their lives in the middle of the factors that determine their habitat, and by what they imagine about themselves and about others in order to "suture" the flaws, the absences, and the disappointments' (ibid.: 751). This pursuit generally requires a comprehension of social and spatial processes, but it is precisely this understanding that Lees (2003: 108) finds missing in many studies as she criticises them 'for "interpreting the spatiality of human life" in the city not through ethnographic research but through academic accounts, poems, and secondary material already published'. Her concern also stems from the fact that such studies can limit themselves to the exterior world of surfaces and appearances, and fail to provide a commentary on how the lived experiences of everyday life impacts

the texture of the city. That is, pronouncements on the meaning of the built environment can become vehicles of individualistic expressions, barely grounded outside of the researcher's perceptions (Jacobs 1993). In this aspect, Lees (2004) grudges urban geographers' reluctance to discuss methods, and calls for scholars to reveal a methodological clarity to explain how they arrived at the links between urban spaces and social practices.

Above observations notwithstanding, there is also another reason for spelling out clearly the methodology adopted for this research. Given the researcher's training in architecture and urban design, there were initial concerns amongst social scientists (both at the academic institution and in the field location) that the research outlook will be 'jaundiced' by the superimposition of an 'expert' discourse. Lefebvre's (2002) scorn for architects is well-known, as he scoffed at their establishing and dogmatising an ensemble of significations, poorly developed and variously labelled as "function", "form", and "structure". According to him, the architect's significations were elaborated not based on the perceptions of those who inhabit, but from his/her interpretation of inhabiting, displayed through graphic and visual tools tending towards a metalanguage. He was furthermore concerned that an architect's system tends to close itself off, eluding all criticism, and is put forward, without any other procedure or precaution, as *planning* by extrapolation. Thus, Bridge and Watson (2000) believe that urban designers and planners are preoccupied with taming and ordering the city, making it predictable. Jacobs (1993) reviews literature where planners and architects are seen as "social visionaries" or ideological experts directly involved in producing the built environment. She particularly focuses on those which discuss the need to go beyond the domain of expert discourses to unpack meanings associated with the built environment not only in terms of its designers but also users.

From a scholarly perspective, there is also a considerable lack of faith in the analytical tools of an urban designer, whose skills are generally criticised for being limited to a mere assessment of urban morphology. By creating a

typological taxonomy, this perspective sees the city as stable and fixed, and cannot accommodate an appreciation of difference and change (Crang 2000). Instead of capturing the city mechanically in print, the argument is to view the built form of the city beyond material spaces, and as spaces of the imagination and spaces of representation (Bridge and Watson 2000). That is, the city should be read as signs (Barthes 1966) or as text (Duncan 1990), adopting 'a hermeneutic approach to understanding how landscapes are central to the performance of social identities, investigating how they are read both consciously and practically (inarticulately) by the people who produce and live immersed within them' (Duncan and Duncan 2001: 390). In this context, a designer's reading of the city is considered to be superficial and insufficient, based on a whimsical pattern of analysis that can neither be justified rationally, nor claim to be methodologically rigorous.

Given these biases and concerns, it is imperative to establish that while it is impossible to completely abandon the personal (urban designer) position in studying (in) the city, the data assembled was through a 'socio-scientific' process. In detailing the methodological choice, the methods used, and their relationship to the theoretical tracts outlined in the earlier chapters, this chapter is more than what Corbridge and Mawdsley (2003: 3) refer to as a focus on 'the mechanics of fieldwork', that is, 'exploring some of the "practical" aspects of doing fieldwork. Just how are people getting their boots dirty these days'. In addition to highlighting the more prosaic and quotidian aspects of fieldwork, it explains, at the first level, the rationale behind the methodological choice which was driven by the compulsion of conversing with the city as well as its 'citizens', one that is critical to the research's substantive concern of urban citizenship. This is followed by how the material collected during the process of empirical investigations from the 'citizens', and which exhibited a tendency for scattering as individual experiences, was processed to bring together a 'coherent' discourse. While the information collected is subject to academic interpretation, there is also a conscious attempt at not diminishing the agency of "ordinary people" (Jackson 1999, cited in Lees 2003).

Jacobs (1993) unpacks the city as an object of analysis and as she looks for the discourse of “ordinary people”, she finds that the middle class is strangely absent from the analysis of urban social groups. While this thesis’s focus on the middle-class discourse rectifies this shortcoming, it also raises several methodological issues regarding the research of this social category which are discussed in this chapter. There is as well the aspect of synthesising a series of concrete experiences recorded in a particular setting to a wider application as an interpretative concept. This is not just in terms of theory but also whether it is something specific to the city in which they are lived and enacted or a more universal phenomenon that one is likely to find in other Indian cities. This is addressed in the penultimate section of the chapter before finally explaining the ‘sites’ selected for conducting field investigations.

3.1 Making the methodological choice

In general, fieldwork choice in geography is portrayed as a polarised one between using quantitative and qualitative methods. Whereas the former is presented as a hard, value-free, objective and scientific way of gathering data, the latter is perceived as soft, value-laden, subjective and non-scientific. In recent years, such binary representations have been challenged, with Markusen (2003) arguing that the great divide posited between qualitative and quantitative methods is false. Pile (1991) suggests that there is a fundamental link between qualitative and quantitative exploration, forming a continuum rather than an epistemological break. But even though he believes that ‘there is little to be distinguished between analysing census data, historical documents, interview transcripts and newspapers’ (ibid.: 459), human geographers have tended to rely overwhelmingly on qualitative methods to capture the richness of context-dependent sites and situations (Baxter and Eyles 1997). Those favouring qualitative methods insist that quantitative research neglects the social and cultural construction of the “variables” and fail to understand the “meanings” that are brought to social life, a “deeper” understanding of which can only be provided by a qualitative form of investigation (Silverman 2000).

According to Cloke et al. (1991), qualitative methods, instead of creating lifeless abstractions like quantitative spatial science, rely on a dialogic process which peoples human geography through their focus on the everyday experience and meanings of places.

It thus emerges that qualitative techniques are best suited for first-hand interactions with members of a local community, providing in-depth understanding of the inner working of a particular social group (Mullings 1999; Winchester 2000). Even though Pile (1991: 458) believes that qualitative methods can lead to an impasse where 'we cannot go beyond being more sympathetic, open in revealing personal experiences, and watchful of our prejudices as we try to capture the everyday lived experience of other people', Crang (2002; 2003) in referring to qualitative methods as the new orthodoxy says that they are best suited to exploring social phenomenon such as dominance and are not just about being 'touchy-feely' over issues. In fact he believes that the field is discursively imagined with both the fieldwork and the fieldworker being socially constructed. This, he asserts, constitutes a cross between what he calls "ontological constructivism and epistemological realism" as a result of which qualitative methods are best suited for mature reflection and evaluation. Since the objective of this research is not to evaluate quantitatively the middle class's socio-economic position, but to understand their significance through their lived practices and codes of behaviour, qualitative methods were chosen to conduct this enquiry.

3.2 Conversing with the city and its 'citizens'

With the choice of qualitative framework established, semi-structured in-depth interviews were used in combination with some amount of participant observation and on-field 'site' observation to generate a large proportion of the primary data. Supplementary material was collected from textual sources and documents such as byelaws of residents' associations, readers' mail and daily reporting in the city dailies and neighbourhood weeklies, and planning/policy documents issued by the city development authorities. Silverman (2000) in

citing Mason (1996) warns that combining interview data on individual's perceptions with discourse analysis of particular texts can be tricky as the former treats all accounts as socially constructed while the latter attempts to provide a definite version of reality. He is concerned with using documentary sources as surrogate data, as documents such as byelaws can only state their aspirations but hardly reveal how the organisation actually operates on a daily basis. Nevertheless multiple methods are a useful way of cross-referencing the material assembled and help to bring rigour, reliability and validity to qualitative data.

Participant observation was mainly undertaken at the key events of the residents' associations (Extraordinary General Meetings or EGMs held annually and cultural celebrations). This allowed 'hanging out' for a longer period of time at the complexes than during interview sessions but didn't provide an in-depth exposure that is generally associated with this technique. At the same time, it went beyond a mere voyeuristic or curiosity gaze, with the time spent yielding systematic field notes. It was not a wholly successful exercise as there was unease and resentment amongst some residents towards the presence of the researcher at these events. The EGMs, in particular, are generally terse-filled moments when in-fighting amongst the different groups within the association is exposed and creates visible embarrassment for those who wished to present their association as an exemplar to the researcher. Observing such events was important as these were the occasions when the residents' tongues would 'wag loosely' and express opinions that they might be reluctant to reveal during a taped interview.

Conducting 'site' observation was also critical, as it was felt that it was not simply enough 'to know that the urban environment is meaningful but to know who is communicating through the environment, to what audience and to what purposes' (Knox 1982 paraphrased by Jacobs 1993: 831). This was documented through a combination of photography and urban morphology analysis. The intention was not to make a semiotic pronouncement on the

meaning of the built environment but rather to understand the social, political, economic and material context of its formation, and whether this is authored by the interests of certain social groups at the expense of others. The urban analysis toolkit of the researcher, gained from experience as an urban designer and planner, was applied for this purpose. This involved constantly walking up and down the case study areas, jotting notes on a map that extended beyond being a mere survey to include observations on the socio-spatial evolution of neighbourhoods and how the social interactions are spatially manifested, especially in socially overlapping areas.⁴³

In terms of the choice of interview as a preferred method, it needs to be acknowledged that these are the staple diet of qualitative research. In contrast to questionnaires and surveys asking 'a rigid set of simple questions which "force" or push the respondents' answers into particular categories, which they may not have thought of unprompted or may not want to use', interviews allow for explanations related to experiences including the expression of all complexities and contradictions (Valentine 1997: 110). Interviews are a useful mode as they are basically conversations and dialogues with a purpose rather than an interrogation (Eyles 1998), where participants are encouraged to phrase in their own words their perceptions and understanding of the subject that is being researched. In qualitative interviews, the dialogue itself becomes the object of study so as to understand the taken-for-granted social worlds, values and behaviours as expressed by participants and provide a focus on human meaning. Whereas Crang (2003) is concerned that there is an apparent concentration in geography on interview-based methods of research instead of traditional "immersive" ethnography, Elwood and Martin (2000: 656) state otherwise that 'the interview is not just an opportunity to gather information by

⁴³ For instance, if you assume that architecture is a style statement at one level, determined by a time-code, then by observing the architectural and urban design styles of the different developments, you are able to draw a historical timeline of their evolution. And if you also acknowledge that the architectural vocabulary employed has a social status connotation, there you can roughly map a social classification of the different projects. When two different 'social classes' are located in adjoining proximity, their interfaces are marked out to note possible areas of conflict or contention.

asking questions and engaging in conversation, but is also an opportunity for participant observation'. Thus, going by Rose's (1997) position that for those wanting to study the situated knowledge, i.e. knowledge that is partial and produced under specific circumstances, in-depth interviews are the best source of data collection, interviews emerged as the main method for compiling primary material.

3.2.1 Entering the field: experts and key informants⁴⁴

In the first instance, interviews were held with 'experts' to understand the recent trends in the development of the city following a committed pursuit of neoliberalisation policies. It included interviews with planners from the Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority (CMDA), an official from the Tamil Nadu Housing Board (TNHB), academic planners, and journalists writing on city/neighbourhood development issues. Their interviews provided an insight into the economic system of the city, its political structure, and development practices, helping to map the ideologies of those involved in producing the built environment. Through a series of informal conversations and formal interviews with the journalists it was possible to understand the rise of the middle class socially, economically and politically, and obtain an updated ethnographical description of their recent social and cultural patterns. These interviews allowed the gathering of the kinds of qualitative and descriptive data that could have been difficult and time-consuming, and also proved a good way of entering the field. 'Experts' were helpful in framing an 'ordinary' language shorn of the academic jargon, in accord with everyday understanding for use in interrogating the middle-class perceptions of themselves as 'proper citizens'. They grasped effectively the conceptual framework, and gave cues or examples of situations, identifying everyday practices where this might be best manifested. What emerged from these interviews was a predisposition within the city towards the bourgeois aesthetic

⁴⁴ See *Appendix 2* for list of interviewees.

of the growing middle class, substantiating the 'bourgeois urbanism' arguments presented in *Chapter Four*.

Interviews with editors of the neighbourhood weeklies covering the selected areas yielded valuable information on local NGOs, and neighbourhood-level activity groups. Many were run by local residents taking a leadership role in the maintenance of and improvements to the area. As key actors and local notables they are natural observers of the scene and could provide in-depth information on the residential groups in the area being researched. They offered an inside knowledge into some of the issues, aspects that wouldn't have become apparent otherwise. Pilot interviews were held with these key residents helping to sharpen the interview topic guide. As the key informants were mostly from the local middle-class community, they also helped identify residents for the interviewing process.

Although Tremblay (1957) believes that key informants have minimum personal bias, Ramachandran (2004) found that as community leaders working with the community in question, they are not neutral or impartial actors, and are tied to social hierarchies. In this research, there were several instances where the key informants were found to be at loggerheads with some of the participants over several issues. In such instances, it seemed as if there was an ulterior motive to their recommendations, as they invariably expected some 'reporting back' on the adversarial position adopted by the participant to their project or organisation. Such expectations had to be navigated with care without compromising the confidentiality of the interview.

3.2.2 The inner-world of 'citizens'

Contacts with office-bearers of the residential associations were established either through introductions from the key informants or through developers of

such developments.⁴⁵ Association officials were first interviewed to get an idea of the aims and objectives of the association, their rules and regulations, their everyday activities and concerns, their interactions with neighbouring associations and other organisations (state/public agencies and private groups catering to their consumer demands), developmental concerns, and future plans in terms of its evolution as a community-level organisation. Following these sessions, they were asked to participate individually as residents in one-on-one interviews and also identify other residents. While many such referrals were in the same complex, in several instances they introduced residents from other residential complexes and thus helped enlarge the initially selected list of residential developments.

Unlike questionnaires and surveys, the aim here was not to choose a representative sample but to select an illustrative one. With random sampling, the intention is to study a representative subsection of a precisely defined population in order to make inferences about the whole population, whereas the objective here was to study a particular group of individuals and their actions/reactions in a specific setting. Thus, purposive sampling where participants were enlisted through a snowballing process of recommendations was used. O'Connor (2004: 172) is enthusiastic about this refereeing technique given the 'rapport enhancing qualities of the referred introduction technique and the provisional insiderness it provided for'. While snowballing helps researchers to overcome one of the main obstacles to recruiting participants, and cuts short the warming-up process of establishing a rapport, it is also important to use multiple contact points so that one does not end up recruiting all the informants from a very narrow circle of like-minded people. Another problem with this is that, having been referred to by a fellow resident, participants were invariably curious about what his/her 'friend' had to say about the issues discussed. When an inability to reveal anything on grounds of

⁴⁵ Mail drops or cold calling are not viable options in Indian cities as people are distrustful of unknown people writing to them or even worse ringing their bells. In a highly polarised society, strangers are seen as a threat or danger, and even a letter of introduction from a reputed institution like LSE could be read as a sophisticated con.

confidentiality was expressed, they were visibly irritated or displeased and this affected the quality of the interview. An extension of this problem was that they were all bound to compare notes at some point, thereby influencing the tone of future interviews.

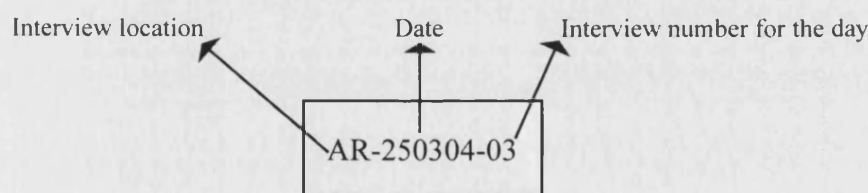
Residents from other social groups were also interviewed for experiences of their interactions with the new middle class.⁴⁶ This included the upper class and the rich, the old middle class, the lower class and the poor, and in the case of the ECR, fishermen residing along the coast. Such interviews helped to get a viewpoint from a different perspective, as well as understand the interactions between the different residents' associations (either in an associative, collaborative manner or in a contestation over a conflicting issue). While it generated rich empirical material, it should be noted that given a limited timeframe, interviewing different social groups, particularly when they share an antagonistic or challenging relationship can be a methodological conundrum as the desire to understand the perspectives of both groups in depth is not that easily fulfilled.

3.2.3 Demographic characteristics

As mentioned in *Chapter One*, 84 interviews were conducted with 110 residents in two phases, first in 2003-04 for a period of eight months, followed six months later with a six-week visit. Since the focus was on transnationalised new middle class, participants in the age group of 30-45 were deliberately sought (83 in total). 27 residents, who were aged 50 and above, were also interviewed. In many instances they were parents of the new middle class, who perceived themselves as the old middle class, and provided views on the difference in the way the two groups approached the role of their residents

⁴⁶ Of the 110 participants, 61 were clearly the new middle class living in residential complexes catering to a new 'lifestyle' (*Chapter Five*), 29 belonged to the old middle class living in the older residential colonies, 10 comprised of the upper class/elites, and 10 were from the *kuppams* and slum resettlement colonies.

associations.⁴⁷ Also, since retired people are the ones who are most active in the residents' associations, it was imperative to interview them to understand how these associations work. Fifty seven interviews in neighbourhoods along East Coast Road (ECR) were conducted as against 25 on Arcot Road (two were miscellaneous interviews in other areas). Nine interviews were conducted as group discussions with residents' association officials, 69 were with individuals, and six involved couples/extended family members (see *Appendix Two*). While residents didn't make a particular request to conceal their identities, and no condition of anonymity was agreed, their names have nevertheless been withheld from use. While neighbourhood names are real, each resident has been giving an 'identity tag' to accompany verbatim quotations. The 'tag' includes the date of interview, with a prefix indicating the location (AR for Arcot Road, ECR for East Coast Road, and MISC for others), while the suffix reveals the interview number for that day (see below).



3.2.4 Constructing the interview guide

Interview guides mark a stage when the research question that is informed by academic literature is stripped of its theoretical references and rephrased in common or popular jargon easily understandable to the layperson. The first realisation upon arrival in the field is that the research question cannot be directly put to test. One cannot walk in and ask 'so, how are you asserting yourself as the "proper citizen" of the city, and how do you use your residents' association to make your point?' Firstly, even though people in everyday conversations do make allusions to being a 'good citizen', citizenship as

⁴⁷ *Chapter Two* discussed the difference between the old and new middle class in terms of employment characteristics. What emerged on field is that this delineation is often constructed at a generational level where the parents' employment profile matches that of the old middle class while their children are mostly in new middle class employment.

understood in a social scientific manner is an abstract concept. Secondly, the question implies 'negative' assumption of the middle class, and is bound to be countered by denial, thus removing all opportunities to understand their everyday practices and assertions. The objective of the research was therefore presented simply as a study of the rise of the middle class in a changing economic context. Given the fact that there has been a lot of press coverage, nationally and internationally on the rise of the Indian middle class, they were aware of the growing interest in them as a social category and hence didn't question the intention further.

Participants were first asked to give some biographical background about themselves. While this was not their 'life story', it helped to break the ice, and get them talking about their middle class identity, and their understanding of the much discussed rise of the middle class. This gave a preliminary peek into how they wear their middle class 'tag' (proudly, indifferently, or ashamedly). The next set of questions revolved around their present residence (and how they became a homeowner). They were then asked to elaborate on their residents' association, their participation in its activities, and their perception in terms of its potential to take on larger issues, outside of their residential complex.

At this point, their opinions were sought on the general changes/improvements in the city, as initiated by the state in its pursuit of a particular form of urban development strategy, whether they subscribed to it, and to what extent. This was particularly helpful in understanding the way they (prefer to) engage with the state (*Chapters Five and Six*). Neighbourhood weeklies along with key informants were helpful in identifying 'local' issues/problems in the study areas, and these were flagged up for discussion. While seeking 'their side of the story', residents were also asked to think beyond the box, setting these concerns in the context of wider development objectives of the city, linking it back to their earlier comments on the state's efforts.

There were a few surprises though in terms of following the agenda of the topic guide. Initially, the guide was constructed in such a way that opinions of all residents would be sought on the potential of the 'civil society' agenda of their residents' associations, as well as their formulation of a public spaces discourse via their re-imagination of the beaches in the city. But since residential developments were chosen along two different stretches in the city, Arcot Road and East Coast Road (more on their selection in a later section of this chapter), their conversations generally centred around very narrow concerns, specific to their particular residential stretch. Thus, it was difficult to engage all residents in a discussion involving a universal set of questions.

For instance, as *Chapter Six* will show, public spaces are either public or parochial, depending on and related to the degree of involvement of the residents. Thus, while residents of East Coast Road, being close to the shoreline, were eager to discuss their aspirations for developing the beach as a (parochial) public space, Arcot Road inhabitants shied away from the topic, with a general comment of 'it would be nice to have quality public spaces in the city, not just the beach, but parks and play grounds too' (AR-220204-02). As the residential complexes along Arcot Road are large, introverted developments, with children's play areas, shops, and other amenities, these residents subscribed less to the idea of 'public goods'. Thus, the topic guide had to be revised to incorporate certain specificities related to the interests of the residents. In this regard, the guide was in constant evolution as every interview would invariably reveal something that needed to be 'tweaked' before the next one. While it is undeniable that later interviews will benefit from this constant 'refitting' of the guide, this in no way affected the quality of the interviews, as each interview produced a unique set of material, a valuable contribution to the overall process of gathering primary information.

3.2.5 Interpreting the data

Of the 84 interviews conducted, 60 were taped, while detailed notes were taken during the non-taped interviews. Forty two of the taped interviews were transcribed verbatim.⁴⁸ Even though the intention is to retain the voice of the participants in its original state, this doesn't stop the researcher from thinking of interpreting their statements. In this respect, Berry (2002) believes that it is more helpful to create a coding template before the interviews commence as it increases the chances that the probes will consistently fill in the information needed for each case or each subject. Thus, for the discourse on public spaces, literature review indicated that a bourgeois imaginary would involve two main concerns of dirt and danger. Not surprisingly, conversations revolved around the same, thereby proving the usefulness of 'pre-coding' through the topic guide.

But still, data in its crude form does not allow any real test of the major thrust of the argument, and Crang (2000) cautions against taking the full transcript of interviews as simply "data". While he pushes for a more codified approach, and it cannot be denied that coding is crucial to establishing the validity of the empirical material by critically connecting it back to the theoretical concept, it should be noted that coding is not something that is blindly applied as a must-do. One needs to keep in mind that the responses of the participants are not structured according to any particular category in their minds. Coding here becomes a manipulation where the responses given as a direct access to their 'experiences' is actively reconstructed as 'narratives'. Moreover, while coding furnishes "a powerful conceptual grid" which is helpful to organise the data analysis it also deflects the attention away from uncategorised activities (Silverman, 2000). Subjecting them to narrative or content analysis and superimposing theoretical assumptions over the data means that the different discourses in the respondents' talk is summarised as a simple, reductive list, for on the contrary, people do not attach one single

⁴⁸ Thirteen taped interviews could not be transcribed due to poor quality audio recording, while the remaining five were used directly from the tape.

meaning to their experiences. For instance, discussions with the residents along ECR about their residents' associations and their aspirations for the beach as a public space showed that these are not two different issues, and that their understanding of the scope of their residents' association influenced the way they framed the re-imagination of the beach. Rigid coding would have compartmentalised the different issues and failed to accommodate these overlaps. Instead, following Crang's (1997) suggestion, a process of "open coding" was adopted where notes were made to build a "theoretical memo" on what they meant in terms of the overall research question. Also, the data collected was presented for peer debriefing, identifying all possible sources of interpretation and misinterpretation.⁴⁹

Verbatim quotations are used throughout as much as possible for revealing how meanings are expressed in the participants' own words rather than the words of the researcher. Also, keeping in mind Silverman's (2000) and Crang's (2000) warning that often only brief and persuasive data that are in favour of the research question are 'mined' for the ready quote, creating problems of "anecdotalism" where a few well-chosen "examples" of the apparent phenomenon are used, an attempt was made here to analyse less clear and sometimes even contradictory data. This was particularly the case when middle class residents elaborated their position on the re-imagination of the beach. Expressing their frustration at its 'pitiful' state, their first instincts were to indulge in a blame-game of 'othering', where their identification of the culprit was, in several instances, riddled with contradictions (*Chapter Six*). If these were not clarified during the course of the interview, they became a challenge during the interpretation phase. In such cases, the data is used in its ambiguity, corroborating to a certain extent, the ambivalence of the middle class discussed in the previous chapter.

⁴⁹ This was done at the local institution, Madras Institute of Development Studies where the researcher was based as a visiting fellow during the course of fieldwork. Information collected was constantly presented to the staff and students during seminars and discussion groups for feedback and identify the multiple ways in which the same data could potentially be interpreted.

3.3 Interviewing the middle class: some issues and implications

Researching the middle class posed several dilemmas requiring careful manoeuvring to ensure that the reliability and validity of the data collected was not compromised. With the popular press portrayals of middle-class socio-economic renaissance in an era of neoliberalisation, studying the Indian middle class is becoming a cottage industry of sorts. Despite this trendiness, there has been little reflection on the methodological problems that arise as they are still practically unresearched domains in development history. First and foremost is the tricky aspect of addressing the middle class categorically as a social class. While Crang (2002) explains that it is not enough to simply listen and give voice to the silenced and that studying the subaltern and the elites is equally important to inform our understanding of an unequal world, the question is whether a research exercise on the middle class can be approached as a study of the elite?

Chapter Two discussed at some length the elite nature of the middle class, concluding that while scholars are divided on this issue, what is apparent is the increasing propensity of the new middle class to assume an elite status, if not in real terms, at least in aspiration. But if one defines an elite as someone who is powerful, is in a position of authority, is a leader and has a strong role to play in governance situations, then doubt still persists over the ability of the new middle class to exercise themselves as elites. For, unlike elite interviews, where the interviewees are conscious of their own importance, wielding considerable power during the course of the interview, and are coherent and well-formulated in their responses, middle-class respondents displayed characteristics to the contrary, where there was no sensation of 'interviewing up'. Even though they acknowledged their recent economic successes, their responses were not authoritative statements. In fact, it is more the old middle class members who as bureaucrats and technocrats in the "ruling coalition" displayed more of an elitist behaviour during the interviews. While the elite status of the new middle class conveyed through their consumer habits, the

‘old’ members revealed it through their power-tilting behaviour enabled by their proximity to the ruling elite, and tended to project it during the interviews.

It should also be noted that middle class is an identity that is frequently invoked by the Indian elites, often to gain wider currency for their (in)actions. It is not uncommon to find influential and prominent entrepreneurs of the new Indian economy like Narayana Murthy and Nandan Nilekani, chairmen of the highly successful Infosys Limited (a company that trades at a global level offering technological services to multinational concerns and symbolises an ambitious and globalising India), referring to themselves as members of the middle class. What they fail to admit is that while their origins may be traced to a middle-class background, their entrepreneurial practices today are steeped in elitist aspirations. Such tendencies to disassociate themselves from an elite status needs to be carefully noted.⁵⁰

And yet with the middle-class tendency to look ‘downwards’ those ‘below’ themselves with supremacist convictions, they are perceived as a ‘privileged’ group. But for an academic from a middle-class background, while studying the middle class involves neither looking ‘up’ nor ‘down’, this autobiographical, autoethnographic exercise does generate its own set of fieldwork anxieties. Entering the field with a complacency of examining the practices of a social group that one belongs to, there were nevertheless problems of positionality and reflexivity, an issue that is generally associated with the studying of ‘others’. Made relevant by the work of feminist scholars, positionality and reflexivity is defined by Valentine (1997: 113) as acknowledging ‘who you are and how your own identity will shape the interactions that you have with others’. She adds that ‘it is important to recognize the different power relationships that exist between yourself and

⁵⁰ Clark and Sison (2003: 226) in their study of elite perceptions of poverty and the poor in the Philippines found that several elites ‘referred to themselves as middle class when by any objective measure they belonged to a distinct class and status elite’. They trace a strong pattern of groups denying their own influence, especially among those most firmly established in society. One of the reasons is that by doing so, they plead their inability to take greater responsibility in addressing poverty or other social development issues.

your informants....[and] be sensitive to the power-laden nature of interviewing encounters' (ibid.). But akin to Ramchandran's (2004) experience, it was quickly obvious that self-reflexive and cautious methodological practices are not enough to solve the problematic details of positionality in the field.

Valentine (1997) generally states that there is a positive aspect to the researcher and the participant coming from the same background, with the sharing of similar identities facilitating the development of a rapport between the two, and yielding a rich, detailed conversation based on empathy and mutual respect/understanding. But despite the absence of academic voyeurism where the marginalised groups are treated as "exotic others", there are disadvantages to 'insider' fieldwork as well. The insider lacks the neutrality of an outsider who brings a greater degree of objectivity and ability to observe behaviours without distorting their meanings. Moreover, as Mullings (1999) states, no individual can consistently remain an insider and few ever remain complete outsiders. This was clearly experienced in the present research where the researcher's position shifted constantly between being an insider and outsider, similar to Chacko's (2004) description of her fieldwork experiences where the insider/outsider subjectivities left her with a feeling of being adrift, in a state of uneasy balance, a position symptomatic of "native" social scientists who choose to work in their own cultures and communities.

3.3.1 Accommodating the multiple identities of the middle class

Chapter Two argued that the identity of the middle class is framed prominently by the intersection of class and cultural politics, as a result of which it can be expected that its members would subscribe to multiple identities. But field investigations adopted a class-based discourse, focussing more on the class values of the respondents. This was mainly due to the participants' reluctance to discuss openly their subscription to identity politics, and their discomfort regarding questions of caste. Though a majority of the participants were Hindus, their caste identities were revealed only in subtle ways. While it could be deduced that many belonged to upper-caste groups, an aspect which

influences to a large extent their decision to not 'get their hands dirty' and participate in community-level cleaning exercises (*Chapter Five*), or their perception of dirt in public spaces (*Chapter Six*), even indirect hints at possible influences of caste resulted in defensive replies: 'I don't think this [caste] has anything to do with this' (AR-050304-01).⁵¹ Insisting otherwise would not only have produced an ill-fitting material, it would also have jeopardised the overall objective of the research. It was thus assumed that the axis of class primarily cuts through and dominates their cultural subsystems, with other identities (Hindu, upper-caste) reworked within the parenthesis of class.

The research also tended to slip in positionality with respect to the researcher's circumstances of feminist epistemology. Even though participants included both male and female members, it wasn't possible to reflect in depth on the influence of gender in the responses. First of all, female participants were in a small minority. Only 30 out of the 110 residents were women. Of these, 12 were interviewed through two group-interviews, and six were interviewed jointly with their husbands. This relatively small sample could be attributed to the fact that residents were selected through a snowballing process, beginning first with interviews of residents' association officials. Associations are dominated by men, who invariably pass on the contact details of other male residents.⁵² While arranging interviews, even though the desirability of other household members' participation was clearly communicated, women (housewives) tended to sit in during the initial few minutes but never for the entire interview. Middle-class members often claim an 'extremely busy schedule' and pinning them down for an interview can be a

⁵¹ Of the 110 participants, only four were non-Hindus and two claimed to be atheists. One distinguishing feature of upper-caste Hindus is their vegetarianism. In many associations, only vegetarian food is served at their cultural events. Wondering whether this indicated a domination of upper-caste households, this issue was raised with the association officials, who dismissed its significance, saying that it was merely a matter of convenience. A few attempts were made to probe this further during individual interviews but participants similarly refused to engage with the issue.

⁵² Of the 26 residents' associations interviewed, only three had a considerable presence of women officials. But during the interviews, it was generally emphasised that while gender probably played a role in soft issues like organising cultural events, it really did not matter when it came to hard issues like infrastructure services and development concerns.

long process. Getting them to commit to even an hour's conversation was a difficult task. Under these circumstances, it was neither possible to have a balanced sample, say in terms of sex, nor was there time to probe identities such as gender. Nonetheless, this restraint was perhaps not too disconcerting, as scholars like Mullings (1999) have found that positionality based on gender can be cut short by the dominance of class differences.

3.3.2 Ethical dilemmas

A more challenging issue was that of ethics. The research objective was to investigate the exclusionary practices of the middle class claim to the city and its public spaces. But this couldn't be openly acknowledged as it would only 'put them off' the exercise. Instead, as already stated, the research was introduced as an examination of the rise of the middle class given their recent economic success. There is a limit to how honest a researcher can be with the participant, and the truth was only partially revealed when the research aim was explained as an enquiry into how the middle class are calling upon the city and its spaces to make it relevant for their own lives. To avoid any preconceived biases, the research was also presented to the middle class as an opportunity to prove that they are not "judgemental dopes" but that their actions are driven by a rationality and moral accountability.

Given the propensity of several scholars to witch-hunt the Indian middle class (for instance, Varma 1999), on-field investigations needed to ensure that the middle class was not exorcised as demons. It was therefore important that the interviews did not become cathartic confessions attempting to entrap the participants during guilt-trip moments. The language of the interview was carefully constructed, modified and rephrased over time to ensure that at no point did it slip into an accusatory tone. Moreover, taking Silverman's (2000) suggestion, opportunities were constructed into the interview for the participant to answer with examples of incidents such that the theoretical assumptions could be constantly refuted and disproved. At the same time, the middle class is an articulate social group capable of explaining its

opinions and actions eloquently in a convincing manner. Care had to be taken in weighing their explanations, sifting carefully through their various statements, and rejecting some as 'lame excuses'.⁵³

Nevertheless, the ethics of informed consent, privacy, harm, exploitation and sensitivity to their opinions (Cloke et al. 2000) could not be strictly adhered to. Crang (2003: 497) reacts to the researcher's inability to fully reveal the research intention by simply saying that while 'deception can and does occur, from both parties, it is also quite important to recognize that our projects are often unstable entities which are not only presented, but actually exist, in multiple versions given to funders, colleagues, friends, family, peers and (different) respondents, none of which need be necessarily the "true one"'. Thus, while there was worry about deceptive practices, of equal concern is the level of honesty in the participants' responses. Being an educated class, they were often able to discern easily moments during the interview where their statements would compel 'critical' scrutiny. Also since the research was probing their attitudes towards conflicting or opposing claims they were aware that what they say may portray them in a bad light. At such moments they resorted to standard patterned answers and insincerity in their responses became a common problem during interviews creating the possibility of 'poor material'. In these instances, instead of seeing the participant's statement as a 'lie', it was treated as a different position amongst a variety of positions that can be assumed by one person. Equally, as a 'talkative' group, the middle class often engaged in reverse interrogation, enquiring about the researcher's opinions on the topics discussed. This required some careful negotiation as the responses of the participants were bound to be influenced by the position of the researcher. In this respect, one can argue that irrespective of the level of

⁵³ For instance, when residents of Valmiki Nagar were asked about their involvement in a particular NGO effort *Puduvellam* organised by a local resident, many confessed to their non-participation, but suggested that it was mainly due to poor dissemination of information. Probing this further though revealed a deeper set of prejudices and preconceptions of the middle class towards this particular initiative and NGOs in general, aspects which would not have become apparent if their reasoning had been taken at its face value. See *Chapter Five* for a more detailed discussion.

honesty in the participant's response, the researcher should come clean about the research intentions. While this may help build trust, there is a good chance that in reality it would have sabotaged the research. This risk was not taken and full disclosure was withheld from the participants.

While Rose (1997) believes that no position is ever clearly revealed, in the absence of a properly spelt stand of the researcher, the participants sometimes assumed an experiential commonality with the researcher (given the same social standing). This posed a few problems. Firstly, middle-class residents often assumed that the researcher understood what they were talking about and hence did not explain themselves thoroughly leaving quite a few thoughts implied and unexpressed. For instance, the reluctance of their associations to adopt a larger, federating role was mainly due to their unwillingness to partner with other classes. But this was mostly expressed through sentences like: 'you know, in India, everything is a hassle' (ECR-070404-01), assuming that as a member of the middle class, the researcher would have had a similar experience.

Secondly, when the middle class expressed themselves invectively against other social classes, the researcher has a few choices – acquiesce with their opinion, say nothing or contradict them and challenge their position. Valentine (1997: 122) argues that researchers 'must challenge offensive comments, because to remain silent is to reproduce and legitimize the interviewees' prejudices through collusion'. But to do so would destroy the carefully built rapport and affect the interview adversely. The dilemma is of whether one should challenge them or simply play silent spectator, collect as much data material as possible and reflect on their comments at a later point. In this research, varying tactics were adopted when 'politically incorrect' comments were made, particularly when portraying the fishermen or the poor as 'crooks'. Either the respondents statements were probed deeper to understand the context better, or if it was felt that doing so would alert the

participant to the fact that s/he had said something 'wrong', such remarks were left as 'one-line reflections' without the benefit of a deeper understanding.

3.3.3 Language

Most of the interviews were held in the homes of the participants and in English, interspersed by Tamil phrases.⁵⁴ It was not uncommon for the participants to switch between the two languages, and several anecdotes were narrated in the lingua franca of *Tamglish*. There was no conscious effort to impose either English or Tamil as language choice on the participants. Instead the decision was intuitively made, with the research project explained in a 'common' manner using a mix of English and Tamil words, and the interviews conducted in a similar fashion.⁵⁵ On the other hand, interviews with the poor and lower-income groups including the fishermen residing along ECR were held in Tamil. Language plays a crucial role in indexing social group affiliations and is a key aspect of self-presentation and expression of individual identity. The previous chapter has already recounted the way in which English education in India is synonymous with power, status, privilege and the means to upward mobility. When the participants chose to speak in English (fluently), they were emphasising a certain identity – that of the English-speaking middle class, convinced more than before that English is the linguistic counterpart to the process of economic globalisation, at least in urban India. In this aspect, the obvious class line divisions apparent in the language choice between English and Tamil took on additional significance as it demarcated those who had 'done well' with neoliberalisation and those who had missed out on its opportunities.

⁵⁴ In terms of locating the interviews, Elwood and Martin (2000) remind that interview sites imply power and positionality of the research participants, producing "micro-geographies" of spatial relations and meanings, and where multiple scales of social relations intersect in the research interview. Participants had a tendency to refer back to their immediate surroundings (particularly when interviews were held in their homes) to not only 'show-off' their status, but also to emphasise the 'propriety' of their environment.

⁵⁵ Only 14 middle class residents interviewed were non-Tamil speaking, identifying Hindi, Malayalam or Telugu as their mother tongue. But they were fluent in English, and communication was not a problem.

In terms of collecting newspaper material as textual sources, only the English-medium press were accessed. The city dailies *The Hindu*, *Indian Express* and *The Economic Times*, neighbourhood weeklies *Adayar Times* and *Arcot Road Times*, and the fortnightly *Madras Musings* were scanned to compile written discourses (from letters to the editor/readers' mail and reports on city/neighbourhood development issues). The exclusion of Tamil press can be criticised for creating a bias dominated by the linguistic hegemony of English which imparts analytical priority to the empowered and denies space to the disempowered. But the omission can be justified on two grounds. First is the issue of logistics of translating the material collected into English. Secondly, since the focus of the research is on the predominantly English-speaking middle class, and it is generally the English-medium press that the middle class largely subscribes to and communicates through, it was felt that the English-medium newspapers would report best their sentiments, and hence this reliance. As it turned out, a review of middle-class opinion as expressed in these print media helped clarify some of the finer points in the material collected.

3.3.4 Reliability and validity

Critics of qualitative research point to the problems of reliability and validity of the techniques adopted, especially when descriptive narratives are used – they are unique to the circumstances in which they are produced, and hence pose the question of whether they can be generalised. Reliability is defined as the extent to which findings can be replicated or reproduced by another inquirer and validity is the degree to which findings can be generalised to other settings similar to the one in which the study occurred (Denzin and Lincoln 1994). Even though Crang (2002) believes that reliability and validity are concerns of rigour associated more with an empirical realist, objectivist research, Baxter and Eyles (1997) maintain that all empirical material collected should be tested for its rigour. While the responses of middle-class residents in the selected neighbourhoods indicate experiences in a locally specific way, is there a generic nature to these modes of interpretation highlighting the commonality of

the bourgeois systems of meaning? As the next chapter shows the political economy of Chennai is unique, given the nature of the Dravidian state, as a result of which its response to global and neoliberal capitalism will be particular. In this context, can these particular findings about middle-class behaviour in Chennai be extrapolated to other Indian cities? An initial glance through *The Times of India* and *Daily News Analysis* in Mumbai, and *The Hindustan Times* in Delhi indicates both similarities and dissimilarities, and a clear position can only be established after a more in-depth comparative study.

3.4 Fieldwork: selecting sites

Following initial interviews with prominent real estate residential developers and property agents, residential neighbourhoods along the two main arteries of East Coast Road (ECR) and Arcot Road were chosen as 'sites' for studying expressions of neoliberal, bourgeois citizenship in the city (Figure 8). These two roads are characteristic of the changing typology of the city, offering prototypes of 'neoliberal' housing.⁵⁶ This choice of location in the southern part of the city relates to a clear pursuit of bourgeois urbanism by the state and which is influencing spatially the development dynamics in the city (see *Chapter Four*). Initially, the developers' help was sought in identifying residential developments as case studies but it soon became evident that their selections could be couched within hidden agendas. Instead on-field ground survey of the two roads was conducted mapping out all the housing projects along them and developments that are clearly 'new' in their typology but still set and nestled within an 'older' settlement pattern housing residents of other social classes, including the 'old' middle class were first short listed.⁵⁷ For this purpose, the researcher's urban design and planning experience proved

⁵⁶ 20 developers were approached first, of which 13 obliged with an interview. Residential sales representatives from four property companies were also interviewed for the same purpose.

⁵⁷ While there are other more exclusive and gated forms of residential developments catering to the 'new' middle class, for a fuller, enriched exploration of the research question, it was important to locate the case studies within a condition of socio-spatial diversity, where, through interactions with other social groups, opportunities for conflicts are more, and documented examples of claims and counter-claims through prominent incidents can be investigated.

helpful to read the landscape as a text with an 'expert' eye, recognising and understanding the subtle messages encoded within the built environment.

Figure 8: Map of Chennai indicating the location of case study areas



East Coast Road (ECR)

The first attempt to build the ECR took place in 1992 when a series of small village roads connecting fishing villages along the Bay of Bengal coastline were interlinked and improved. Until then the more inland and parallel Old Mahabalipuram Road (OMR) was the only available southern route. But this showed signs of stress from overuse. ECR was initially developed with part financial assistance from the Asian Development Bank as a joint venture project between the Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry governments. Though its completion was scheduled for April 1996, by 1996, improvements were limited as reported in *The Hindu* which described it as *A bumpy road all the way*, hardly functioning as a motorable stretch.⁵⁸ In 2000, the Government of Tamil Nadu asked the Tamil Nadu Road Development Corporation (TNRDC) to take up the improvement, operation and maintenance of the road on a long term basis, extending up to Pondicherry. This time the project cost was funded by a mix of equity share capital and debt, with a toll established to recoup costs.⁵⁹ Completed in December 2001, improvements included widening of a select stretch of ECR to two-lane with a host of value added services including 24-hour trauma care and ambulance facilities, round-the-clock patrolling and security services, vehicle breakdown/tow-away services, and helpline facilities every three Km.

Celebrated as a success, similar projects are being implemented in other Indian states and the ECR model is supposedly the premise behind the National Highways Authority of India's proposed National Highway Development Programme. Various aspects of the project reflect its international flavour, including the importation of retro reflective paint from Kuwait, delineators from Australia, reflectors from Austria, sign posts and high mast lamps from Malaysia, and the provision of 24-hour towing and ambulance facilities just like in any other western country. That the ECR is a symbol of a globalising Chennai became evident when *The Financial Express* wrote that the road

⁵⁸ A bumpy road all the way. (1996, 15 July). *The Hindu*, p. Metro Section M2.

⁵⁹ See website <http://www.tnhighways.org/tnrdc.htm>. Retrieved 18 May, 2007.

becomes the destination, sprinkled with luxury resorts, adventure sport arenas, quaint eat outs, and tourist spots. Its significance was further visible when the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) a key player in India's globalisation process, along with the state tourism department organised a Chennai Festival in which the "Enjoy East Coast Road" was a prominent concept.⁶⁰

While the ECR project has been praised by the state and the press, identifying it as a brand entity of a transnationalising city, there has been some criticism of the project. This has been based on its environmental impact as well as its fundamental neoliberal economic premise where an existing road after some facelift is re-designated as a toll highway, affecting the poor communities who find themselves on the other side of the toll barrier. Ghosh (2003) comments that we now have 'new toll-ways such as the East Coast Road, which are driven by the notion of user charges, and yet do not allow those affected any choice in the matter. Curiously, then, this scenic route becomes yet another expression of the distortions and contradictions of the current neo-liberal paradigm in economic policy'.⁶¹ This argument is easily dismissed by ECR enthusiasts who clarify that two-wheelers, non-motorised vehicles and tractors, ambulances, and fire tenders are exempt from the toll, and that 'a degree of social responsibility has been built into the toll structure, with agriculturists and the poor given due consideration'.⁶² A more appropriate argument to use against this paradigm of branded re-imagination is the way the residential morphology has been transformed along the ECR, influencing and impacting to a large extent the social matrix of the residential neighbourhoods along this stretch.

For many years before these cosmetic improvements were initiated, neighbourhoods in this part of the city were populated by the old middle class

⁶⁰ George, S. (2003, November). The potpourri highway. FE Business Traveller. Retrieved 18 May, 2007.

⁶¹ Ghosh, J. (2003, 04-17 January). Who pays for the roads? *Frontline*, 20. Retrieved 18 May, 2007.

⁶² ECR to become toll road from tomorrow. (2002, 23 March). *Business Line*. Retrieved 18 May, 2007.

(mostly employed in the state sector), who constructed their own house in one of the several residential plot developments promoted by either the city's development authority or private promoters, or purchased a flat in the public housing developments undertaken by the Tamil Nadu Housing Board (TNHB). Such residential colonies were interspersed amongst existing fishermen *kuppams* and richer enclaves catering to the upper classes who preferred living close to the seashore (Figure 9). But with manageable demand, the developments remained sparse, and their interactions distant and indifferent.

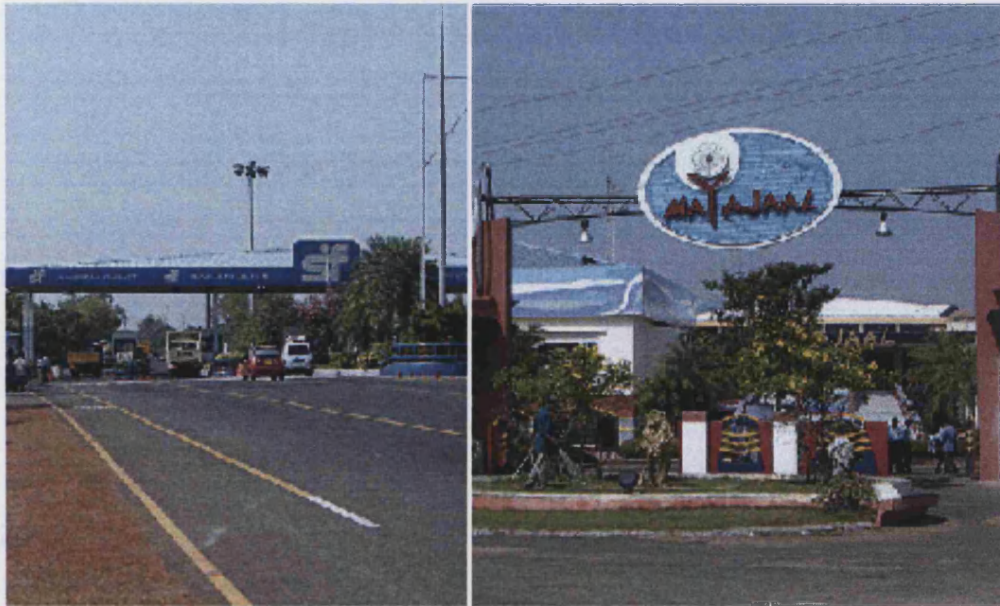
Revamped as a scenic beachway, ECR is one of the most desirable residential addresses in the city today. This is particularly the case amongst the new middle class who seek 'international-style' quality residences replete with 'world-class' facilities and amenities such as clubhouses, pools, and gymnasias, and which are automatically equated with 'a proper way of living' (see *Chapter Five*). Thus, in the past few years, private developers have promoted large residential complexes introducing a new social class into the neighbourhoods along the coastal highway. Their entry has provoked a social heterogeneity bringing conflicts and negotiations in its wake in terms of the urban imaginary of the residential landscape and the public spaces (particularly the beach). The ensuing interface between the different social groups are marked by unease as their interactions range from mutual indifference to differences of opinions, negotiations and reconciliations. Setting the study of urban citizenship in this ensuing heterogeneity provides an opportunity to examine how the middle class (primarily the new but to a lesser extent the old as well) frame the propriety of their vision/interpretation as against the demands of the other social classes (Figure 10).

Figure 9: Neighbourhoods along ECR



Figure 10: Characteristic features of ECR – a photo illustration

Redeveloped as a toll highway and re-imagined as an entertainment corridor....



...it remains a socially mixed stretch comprising of old middle class colonies, fishermen *kuppams*, residential complexes for the new middle class, and bungalows for the rich



Arcot Road

On the other hand, leisurely running in the south-west part of the city is the nearly eight Km stretch of Arcot Road between the historically prominent colonial routes of Poonamallee High Road and Mount Road (or Anna Salai as it has been renamed).⁶³ As the road that led to Arcot, the capital of the then powerful empire of the Nawab of Carnatic, Arcot Road was once a princely route through which the Prince of Arcot would ride to enter the city in all splendour and glory. While the neighbourhoods such as Kodambakkam abutting Arcot Road can lay claims to ancient history, linking their locational significance to events cited in Hindu mythology, it is the more immediate history from mid-twentieth century onwards that made Arcot Road and its adjoining neighbourhoods well-known amongst the city dwellers when, with the advent and popularisation of cinema, Arcot Road became the desired address and location of the various film studios, production houses and cinema theatres.⁶⁴ The neighbourhood of Kodambakkam is synonymous with the Tamil film industry and what was once the largest movie studio complex in Asia, Vijaya-Vauhini studio was located on Arcot Road. Other adjoining neighbourhoods such as Vadapalani, Saligramam and Virugambakkam comprised the residential hub of several personalities from the film and music industry (Figure 11).

⁶³ Arcot Road itself has been renamed as NSK Salai after the popular Tamil film comedian NS Krishnan but its original name still endures in all references, vocal and written. Today, the redesignated version of Arcot Road ends at the Kodambakkam Railway Station, further east of which the road leading up to Mount Road/Anna Salai is called as Kodambakkam High Road/MGR Salai.

⁶⁴ Srinivasan, A. (2004, 02 January). Linked by legend. *The Hindu*. Retrieved 28 May, 2007; Federick, P. (2002, 07 August). Arcot Road: There's glamour amidst chaos. *The Hindu*. Retrieved 28 May, 2007.

Figure 11: Neighbourhoods along Arcot Road



By the early 1980s, changing styles in film production processes made the need for expansive studio settings obsolete and several film studio houses either closed down or were redeveloped for alternative uses such as private hospitals. The mid-1980s witnessed the entry of several private developers into the residential market promoting flats/multiple dwelling units. The opening up of large land parcels such as the former studio and production houses along Arcot Road was eagerly sought by private residential developers. In the rest of the city only small-size parcel lots were available for housing development and new homeowners had to contend themselves with match-box style apartments, cramming in barely 10-12 flats in one single plot. On the other hand, large parcels along Arcot Road promised larger residential complexes replete with open spaces, play areas, swimming pools, shopping facilities, and several private courtyards, all complementing more comfortably laid out flats.

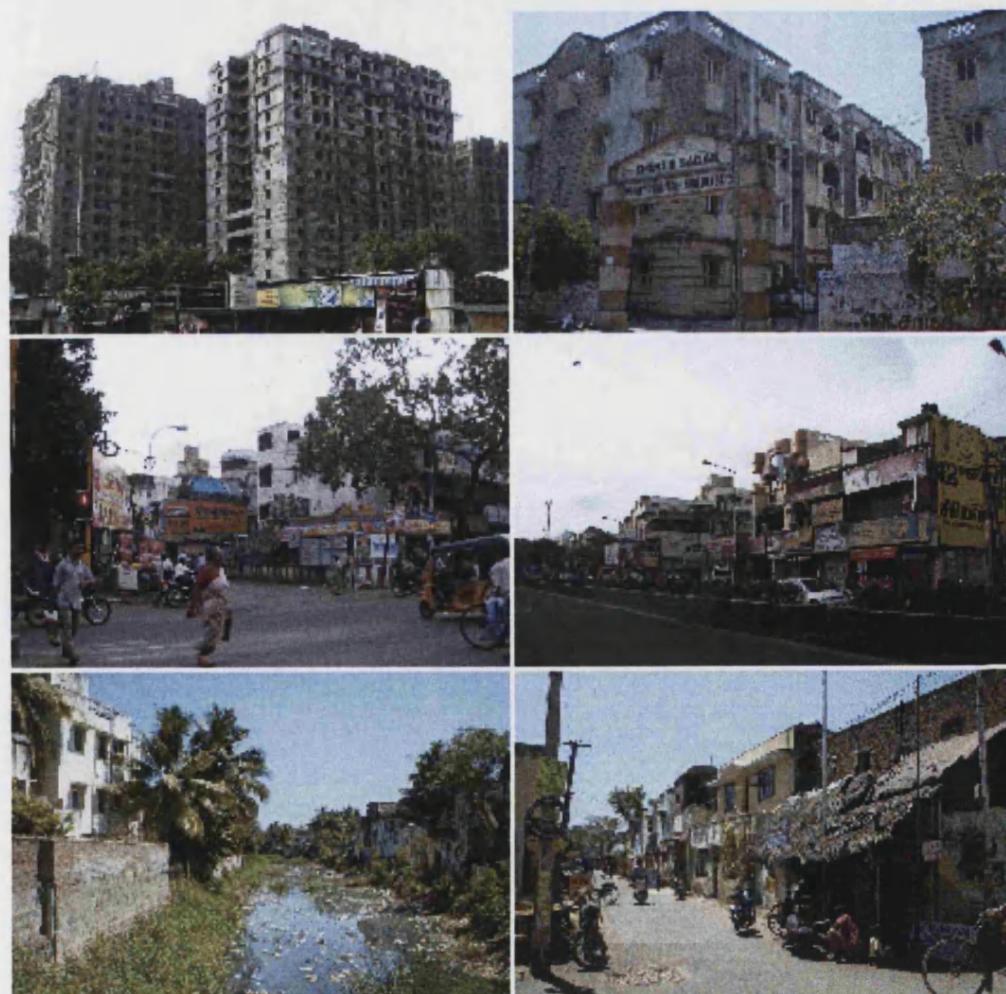
Such projects have been lapped up readily by the new middle class who see several advantages in moving to this area. Arcot Road is strategically located en route to Sriperambudur, the manufacturing hub for several multinational companies including Hyundai, St. Gobain, and Pilkington, a major employment source for this social category (*Chapter Four*). In addition, major branches of two prominent software companies servicing the IT industry are located on Arcot Road (HCL Technologies and Tata Consultancy Services/TCS). Thus for the new middle-class employees working either at Sriperambudur or in these IT companies, residing on Arcot Road is ideal. As in ECR, their entry marks a diversification of the social matrix already in existence. The large, stylised residential complexes offering a host of amenities to the new middle class abut old middle class residential colonies. Interspersed amongst them are extremes of the richer settlements of those associated with the film industry and the less well-to-do areas providing housing and threadbare existence to all the lower-level workers who find only intermittent employment in the film industry (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Characteristic features of Arcot Road – a photo illustration

New middle class aspirations....



...amidst old middle class settlements and the problems of Third World urbanisation



3.5 Conclusion

Whatever the degree of preparedness in a methodological plan, there are bound to be unplanned contingencies in the field. The first realisation on arrival is that Chennai (and, for that matter, urbanisation studies in India) is dominated by a tradition of positivist empiricism. This has typically involved door-to-door questionnaire surveys of a vast number of households. Generally based on a randomly drawn sample of a few hundreds if not a few thousand, local academics found it hard to believe that research could actually be developed and substantiated through a 'touchy-feely' interview of purposely-sampled residents numbering in the double digits. Residents were in fact the first to express this scepticism. Accustomed to a culture of door-to-door surveys (mostly for marketing studies) which required merely the ticking of boxes, and one-line responses, participants were also initially surprised not only by the possibility of conversing with a stranger for an hour or so, but also by the notion that a conversation could be sustained for so long: 'I don't think I will have much to say on this' was a typical initial response before relaxing into the interview.

Consistent with these concerns, in several instances, there was the danger of the discussion meandering through a ramble of poorly put together thoughts. While it is important that the researcher does not try to rein the conversation too much, some semblance of structure is still required if the information collected is to be made legible for further interpretation. Given the nature of the research question, a multiple method qualitative methodology was chosen. This combined semi-structured interviews with a limited amount of participant observation, some direct 'reading' of the built environment (despite all the caution of the social scientists), as well as reviews and analysis of textual sources, including print media, planning documents, technical reports, and byelaws of residents' associations. Interviews were conducted with the help of interview guides which were first prepared by disaggregating the research question to layperson jargon based on inputs from 'experts' and key

informants. Interviews were taped, transcribed and 'open-coded' for interpretation while participant observation yielded a fair share of systematic field notes.

The most unexpected challenge in the fieldwork actually involved dilemmatic issues of interviewing the middle class. Entering the field with a certain complacency of 'going back home' and interviewing members of the same social class, it soon became apparent that this in no way reduced the crisis of positionality and reflexivity. Rather, it revealed a whole gamut of problems, some of which were negotiated during the course of fieldwork, while others could only be addressed *a posteriori* during the process of 'writing up'. While resisting the tendency of post-rationalising such issues, this chapter is a way of addressing them, as it also attempts to revisit and review these concerns from the field perspective and in relation to other chapters, thereby placing them back in their rightful position within this thesis.

4

Excavating Chennai from Madras: Archaeology of development

But for all the change in a city once known for its graciousness and spaciousness, vestiges of things past still survive midst all the symbols of metropolitan growth. Madras is still a green and airy city beloved of those who love the leisurely tempo of the life of the spacious world of yesterday.....more associated with village and small town than with burgeoning metropolis.(Muthiah 1990: 232)

Setting out *The Problem*, the March 2004 issue on *Changing Chennai* published by the Delhi-based *Seminar* magazine summarised that '[i]f Delhi comes across as a court surrounded by villages, its soul corrupted by power, Mumbai as a worshipper of mammon and Kolkata as a city more marked by its past than present, Madras with its unhurried, almost sleepy pace, is seen as representing the continuity of Indian (read Hindu) cultural traditions....To the outsider, the South is Madras, not just the city but the idea – ritually defined, vegetarian and conservative, if not orthodox' (2004: n.p.).⁶⁵ The editorial insists that such a representation is mistaken and that Madras-Chennai is a sprawling metropolis afflicted by all the problems marking large urban agglomerations. It identifies the city as complex and contradictory, experiencing the pangs of pan-Indian, global transformation, and struggling to define a new identity for itself while outgrowing the traditional confines. And yet, despite its resolve to set right this misconception, every single article in this issue on Chennai emphasises the very qualities to which the editorial

⁶⁵ Changing Chennai. (2004, March). *Seminar*, 535. Retrieved 23 May, 2007. This reference to Madras/Chennai as the unhurried city is also captured titularly in CS Lakshmi's (2004) editorial effort *The Unhurried City*, a collection of writings on Chennai.

objects. The contributors nostalgically portray the city as a quiet backwater, conservative in its ways, placing considerable importance on old-fashioned values.⁶⁶ Thus, the annual December Festival of classical music and dance is singled out as the identity of the city, the high climax of tradition that is clearly visible in all aspects of everyday life: dress, food, daily prayers and rituals, and other cultural practices. Portraying it as a forgotten city or “City of Neglect”, Muthiah (2004) describes it as a city of a thousand shrines, remaining closer to a heritage that was ancient when the city was born. Similarly, Murari (2004: n.p.) is convinced that ‘Madras might have been the capital of the.....Madras Presidency but it had never had any pretensions to capital lifestyles. Frankly, it was a village well into the mid-20th century’. Acknowledging ‘the winds of change’ happening in this ‘sleepy village’ in the form of shopping malls and western forms of leisure and entertainment, he dismisses them as the patina of modernity, and reassures that the ‘Madras air, beneath the new odours of Chanel and pesto sauces,...is still...soaked in culture and old traditions’ (ibid.).

Such portrayals of orthodoxy aside, of more significance is the way these writers engage rather awkwardly with the other prominent issue in recent times, and that is its name change from Madras to Chennai, officially decreed by the state government in September 1996. In an indication of its still unresolved nature, while the editorial without much explanation uses the hyphenated expression of Madras-Chennai, historian Muthiah’s account is sarcastically dotted with references to the city as ‘Madras that is Chennai’ (a practice associated with the decision of his bimonthly newsletter, *Madras Musings*, where, in refusing to accept the name change, the tagline was changed to ‘We care for Madras that is Chennai’). In comparison to Doshi’s inaccurate arguments against the name change, Thiagarajan’s honest admission that she never acknowledged the name Chennai as an English name for Madras, attributing the duality of the name to its twin existence in two languages, Tamil and English, is probably closer to truth, as she observes that

⁶⁶ Contributions to this issue included S Muthiah’s *First city of modern India*, Tishani Doshi’s *The Madras syndrome*, Deborah Thiagarajan’s *Chennai: Madras*, Timeri N Murari’s *New wine in the old bottle*, and S Theodore Baskaran’s *Turtles and Antelopes*, amongst others.

language is an issue which has stirred Madras and its politicians over the decades and is key to the character of the citizens of Chennai.⁶⁷ Similarly understandable is Murari's perception of a generational change when he says that the name change indicates a new identity, not backward looking as the ancient name suggests. Writers and celebrity residents of the city writing personalised, stylised narratives will only confront such issues at an individual, emotional level, failing to see the larger political and even economic implications involved in these decisions. For all sections of the society, from the die-hard Madras loyalists, to the sceptics and even the indifferent, the transition in its usage has been anything but smooth, riddled with ambivalence, as references to the city, consciously, subconsciously and unconsciously shifts between Madras and Chennai without any rationality of choice.

The official explanation given by the Tamil Nadu state government was simple enough: it was taking a cue from the Maharashtra state government where the name of Bombay was officially changed to Mumbai in 1995, supposedly to purge the city of its colonial corruption. But as Patel and Masselos (2003) have asserted, there are other, deeper resonances wrapped in the change of nomenclature. And much of these larger meanings will be lost to analysis if we assumed that the renaming was merely a means of decolonisation through vernacularisation. To a large extent, the name change served a strategy of regionalisation pursued by states governed by regional parties. In this aspect, the Tamil Nadu government was merely joining the bandwagon, representing a wider trend pursued by both the conservative and the left-minded forces.⁶⁸ While language was forcefully applied by the regional governments to lend shape to their identity politics, it was also part of a larger

⁶⁷ Doshi's interpretation show clearly her non-Tamil speaking background, as she wrongly suggests that since *nai* in Tamil means a dog, Chennai is a kind of chinny dog. This is phonetically incorrect as the *nai* in Chennai is pronounced differently from the *nai* meaning dog.

⁶⁸ The communist government in Kerala first set the trend when they changed the name of the capital city Trivandrum to Thiruvanthapuram in 1991. The decision to rename Bombay as Mumbai was taken by the right-wing Shiv Sena, as soon as it captured state power in 1995 in alliance with the Hindu fundamentalist party, the BJP. In 1999, the left-wing Communist Party led government in West Bengal renamed Calcutta as Kolkata. More recently, in 2006, the Karnataka Government renamed Bangalore as Bengaluru.

strategic re-imagination of the economic geography of the city and its immediate region, where the name change was critical to the neoliberal direction taken by the state. Given these factors influencing what seemed a 'simple political gimmick', understanding the context in which Madras became Chennai is essential to comprehending the newer forms of citizenship claims that the current political economy has set loose. This requires excavating Chennai from Madras, revealing as a result not just the spatio-temporal archaeology of the city but also the embourgeoisement of a Dravidian state and its global mission, amidst attempts to shrug off the 'backwaters' image.

Adopting a historical narrative, the chapter begins by outlining the odd trajectory of the evolution of the 'city that was never meant to be'. The postcolonial period witnessed the emergence of Tamil cultural nationalism which not only adversely affected the economic fortunes of the state but that of Madras as well. The city was reinvented as a regional capital, cutting short its development as a national metropolitan city. Yet, the city fell woefully short of providing a true Dravidian identity, thus only partially meeting the demands of the Dravidian politics to carve a 'Tamil geography'. This affected its growth to a large extent, slipping in its standing amongst the competitive network of Indian metropolises. While Indian cities in general suffered from urban blight under the pressures of what is often referred to as hyper-urbanisation, a condition signifying the 1970s and the 1980s, regionalisation of cities like Madras and Calcutta only worsened their problems. But the onset of economic reforms and its accompanying phenomenon of neoliberalisation since the 1990s have triggered an 'urban turn' (Prakash 2002). Neoliberalisation unusually found a willing partner in the Dravidian parties who could no longer afford to neglect their capital city as it became crucial for reaping the benefits of economic liberalism. This has meant a complete 'makeover' for the city, starting with its name change to the pursuit of new tenets of urban development. While a rampant image of bourgeois urbanism now signifies the city's landscape, it has also fractured it as a result, producing a sharply divided city, aspects which are discussed in the last section of this chapter.

4.1 A city that was never meant to be

The irony of portrayals described in the first few paragraphs of this chapter is that, Madras as a city did have a promising start. Its colonial foundations trace back to 1639 when a tract of land along the beach was granted by the local Hindu Nayak to the British East India Company for setting up a cloth manufacturing factory (Lewandowski 1977; Neild 1979; Evenson 1989; Muthiah 1990). It proved to be an early economic success, and soon became an important trade centre. Madras was made a Presidency in 1653 and five years later all English settlements on the Coromandel Coast were subordinated to it. By 1687, it was considered the 'Urbs Prima in Indies', and a Corporation and a Mayor's Court was established to ensure good governance (Pinto 2000). But this political glory lasted for just about a century. Trade was soon diverted to the growing port cities of Calcutta and Bombay, which had a rich, resourceful hinterland, and served better the British trading interests. Calcutta became the capital of British India until 1911 (when the capital was shifted to Delhi), and Bombay through its sustained economic success captured the motto 'Urbs Prima in Indies', a title it still holds.

In hindsight, it would appear that Madras was a city that was never meant to be. Bradnock (1984: 38-9) cheekily wrote that:

The description of Madras as a "colonial" city may seem to imply some sense of grand strategy on the part of the colonial power...In fact, nothing could be further from the truth....The choice of location was dictated simply by the favourable prices of cotton...There was little else to recommend the site—no natural harbour, no great agricultural hinterland. A low-lying marshy lagoon surrounded the first settlement. The only advantage it did have was fortuitous. Located on the windward side of the Bay of Bengal, it was in a relatively good position to defend British colonial interests against those of the French and Dutch during a period of intense competition for maritime supremacy between the colonial powers. From this unpromising environment grew south India's largest city.

Given these unfavourable circumstances of its foundation, it is not surprising that Madras was unable to sustain its growth. By the end of the nineteenth

century, Rudyard Kipling was lamenting that the city that was 'Crowned above Queens' is now a 'withered beldame'. Even though Madras was a prosaically thriving modern settlement of over half a million, it simply did not look like a city (Evenson 1989). On the occasion of the Madras Tercentenary Celebration in 1939, an official recorded that "the scenes around the city's temples, tanks and squares are still the same as those witnessed in distant days, the crowds...little different from their predecessors in earlier years, and the Madras fisherman still goes out in his frail craft....exactly as his forefathers did many centuries ago" (cited in Evenson 1989: 218).

If Madras failed to develop a truly urban image it was partly due to the fact that the great industrial boom that transformed the cities of Bombay and Calcutta bypassed Madras as it lacked a surrounding region of natural resources required for a strong industrial economy. With the establishment of the British empire in 1858, the city assumed a new urban status as the administrative capital of a sizeable British Presidency of Madras in south India. But the economic dynamic, based on trade, did not have a major impact on the physical form of the city which retained its semi-rural atmosphere without any metropolitan grandeur (Lewandowski 1975; Evenson 1989).

Such depictions of the city endured well into the twentieth century extending late into the post-independence period. In 1977, when *Aside* began publication as 'a magazine of Madras', it bemoaned that Madras lacks the distinctive ethos of a city, unlike Calcutta or Bombay or even Delhi, still hiding within itself that wonder and surprise of rising out of a village.⁶⁹ And, writing at the turn of the millennium, Muthiah (1999: 402) insisted that 'Madras today...has grown into a metropolis, but it has still not been able to shake off its small town atmosphere'. Madras stepped into the post-independence period as the chief political and administrative centre of southern India and it seemed that this role didn't really challenge the city to redefine its image.

⁶⁹ A write up on *Aside*. (1997, 1-15 February). *Madras Musings*, p. 4.

Although portrayed in the postcolonial era as one of the four major metropolitan cities in India (along with Bombay, Calcutta and Delhi), it was obvious that Madras was poorly qualified to occupy the national platform. Evenson (1989) notes the per capita annual income in the four cities at the beginning of the 1960s: while Rs. 1,180 in Greater Bombay, Rs. 872 in Delhi and Rs. 811 in Calcutta are comparable, Madras's Rs. 437 was a pale fourth. The percentage of industrial employment was again nothing remarkable. Madras had less than 10 percent of its population employed in the manufacturing sector, increasing to 25 percent by the 1970s, much less than Bombay and Calcutta where it ranged between 40 and 60 percent (Bradnock 1984). Comparing the port activities in the three colonial port cities of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras, Evenson (1989: 216) found that the Madras port in 1960 'showed no increase in cargo activity over the preceding two decades, as well as indicating a decrease in the number of vessels using the harbor'. In 1964-65, Madras port handled 4.4 million tonnes of traffic (9 percent of India's total) while Bombay and Calcutta together handled 60 percent of India's total maritime traffic.⁷⁰ Above all, the factor that influenced Madras's failure to establish itself as a national metropolis was the emergence of a new regional political platform in the 1950s and the 1960s which created ambiguity in its position vis-à-vis the national realm and redefined the city more narrowly with respect to its immediate region.

4.2 Dawn and darkness of a Dravidian state

Soon after independence, India found its national unity challenged by the resurgence of regionalist forces that were largely organised around linguistic

⁷⁰ National Council for Applied Economic Research. (1968). *Traffic survey of Madras port*. New Delhi: NCAER.

identity. This resulted in the reorganisation of states along linguistic lines.⁷¹ Caught in the midst of these agitations were metropolitan cities like Madras and Bombay which had large multilingual populations, and due to their economic prominence were claimed by rival linguistic groups. While the Gujarati speaking population of Bombay argued that the city belonged to the newly formed state of Gujarat, not the predominantly Marathi speaking group and the state of Maharashtra, the supporters of Andhra State clamoured for Madras. Eventually Bombay was retained by Maharashtra and the protagonists of Andhra State had to relinquish their demand for Madras.

The reorganisation impacted the way metropolitan cities like Bombay, Madras and Calcutta evolved within a tension created by their dual roles—as cosmopolitan, metropolitan cities that served as national engines of growth and as regional capitals which reinforced regional identities. Thus, Bombay, Madras and Calcutta have been constantly reshaped by the regional parties to highlight a culture mainly framed by the local language – Marathi for Bombay, Tamil for Madras, and Bengali for Calcutta. This yielded ‘an inflammatory parochialism in conflict with the nationalist ideal’ (Khilnani, 1997), whereby these cities, instead of endorsing a national ethos, served to strengthen new regional identities, one that was little more than provincial.

In Madras, this new identity was shaped by the emerging force of Dravidian politics. The Dravidian movement initially promoted the idea of a *Dravidanadu*, the southern land of Dravidian people and languages, distinct from the Indo-Aryan culture prevalent in North India, but eventually evolved into a more viable regional identity of Tamil nationalism, creating ‘a new cosmology for a new Tamil nation’ (Price 1993: 504).⁷² The cultural movement

⁷¹ 14 States and 7 Union Territories were first established, which have been subject to further reorganisation through the years. India today has 28 States and 7 Union Territories.

⁷² There have been several academic publications on the history and character of Dravidian politics. While Barnett’s (1976) *The politics of cultural nationalism in South India* and Hardgrave’s (1965) *The Dravidian movement* are classics, more recently, Subramanian (1999) has also provided a comprehensive analysis of Dravidian politics. Also see, Widlund (2000); Wyatt (2004); Harriss (2001); Washbrook (1989); and Rajadurai and Geetha (1996, 2002).

began to reap political gains when the Dravidian party *Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam* (DMK) swept to power in the 1967 State Assembly elections. Since then, Dravidian parties in one form or the other have retained power at the state level, articulating their politics of cultural nationalism within a populist discourse.⁷³ They reinforced cultural distinctiveness through official steps such as renaming Madras State as Tamil Nadu in 1969, amidst a series of populist actions associating Tamil identity with the anti-elite (Subramanian 1999). But overlapping economic populism with ethnic identities is problematic as it is merely a tool for capturing electoral advantages, yielding economic policies mostly based on entitlements and subsidies.

Continuous Dravidian rule has thus meant a stream of illogical fiscal measures and unsustainable funding mechanisms affecting the economic performance of the state, with Washbrook (1989) alleging that the Dravidian ideology had no means of comprehending policies and arguments geared to the development of a bourgeois state. General indicators of growth reveal that Tamil Nadu witnessed a slump when the Dravidian parties ruled at their populist extremes (MIDS 1988; Table 3). Sinha (2005) explains that the substitution of political strategy in favour of Tamil cultural nationalism based on symbolic and leadership-based politics resulted in a neglect of the institutional conditions necessary for economic development and industrial advancement. Tamil Nadu, between 1967 and 1991 emerged as a state with low regional institutional capacity, where an isolationist non-productive state resulted in low investment. Given the impact of Tamil nationalism and its specific form of populism on ebbing the economic growth of the state in the postcolonial period, it would be useful to examine how these ideologies also shaped the development of the regional capital city, Madras.

⁷³ DMK and its breakaway faction Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (ADMK) are the two main Dravidian parties. There are other parties, such as the Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) and the Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK), which also emerged from the DMK. However, they, along with national parties like the Congress and the BJP, mostly contest the state elections in alliance with either the DMK or the ADMK. More recently, a new party Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam (DMDK) was formed by the Tamil film actor Vijayakanth, contesting the 2006 elections on its own.

Table 3: Tamil Nadu's economic growth 1960-1983

Year	(in Rs. Crores)		State Share of National Income (%)	Per Capita Income (in Rs.)	
	National State Domestic Product	National Income (India)		Tamil Nadu	India
1960-61	1,111.85	13,263	8.38	334	306
1961-62	1,107.60	13,763	8.05	324	310
1962-63	1,138.93	14,045	8.11	327	309
1963-64	1,160.57	14,845	7.82	328	320
1964-65	1,200.92	15,917	7.54	333	336
1965-66	1,174.28	15,082	7.79	317	311
1966-67	1,210.90	15,243	7.94	322	308
1967-68	1,261.11	16,660	7.57	329	329
1968-69	1,296.03	17,057	7.60	332	330
1969-70	1,339.85	18,152	7.38	337	343
1970-71	2,371.10	34,235	6.93	581	633
1971-72	2,490.80	34,713	7.18	599	627
1972-73	2,499.80	34,215	7.31	589	603
1973-74	2,609.30	36,033	7.24	603	621
1974-75	2,265.70	36,590	6.19	514	617
1975-76	2,679.00	40,274	6.65	597	664
1976-77	2,763.20	40,429	6.83	606	652
1977-78	3,030.90	40,046	7.57	654	695
1978-79	3,142.20	46,546	6.75	669	717
1979-80	3,182.60	44,085	7.22	668	664
1980-81	2,812.00	47,507	5.92	584	700
1981-82	3,291.20	49,631	6.63	674	715
1982-83	3,241.80	50,437	6.43	625	711

Note: State and national income are at 1960-61 prices for 1960-61 to 1969-70, and at 1970-71 prices for 1970-71 to 1982-83

Source: MIDS (1988: 337-38)

4.2.1 Ill at ease: Madras as a Dravidian capital city

Dravidian leaders seeking to project Tamil cultural nationalism on to the state capital, were initially uncertain over how to implant such an identity. Madras could neither show a 'glorious' Tamil past nor claim to be a 'genuine' Tamil city like Madurai or Thanjavur.⁷⁴ Its colonial foundation hardly allowed any historic credibility, to the extent that in 1962, Kamaraj, the Congress Chief Minister suggested transferring the capital to Madurai because it had "nurtured" Tamil language, culture, and political life (Hardgrave 1964). But as

⁷⁴ Madurai and Thanjavur were the capitals of ancient Tamil kingdoms such as the Pandyas and Cholas, who along with the Pallavas (ruling from Mamallapuram near Chennai) comprised the three main political units of the historic Tamil geography. For the Dravidian parties, these cities were important as their prosperity was often cited in Tamil epics, legitimising them as the heart of Tamil Nadu.

Cutler (1983: 271) explains Madras may not take pride of place in the annals of Tamil cultural history, nevertheless the politics of Tamil nationalism has made a significant impact upon the city: 'Madras's cultural identity is complex and ambiguous. To describe Madras as a Tamil city would be to overlook its cosmopolitan flavour; but to ignore its strong ties with Tamil culture would also result in a distorted view of the city's character'. It was in Madras that all Dravidian parties found their footing, developed their ideology and established their initial success. And significantly, it was in the 1959 Madras Municipal Elections that the DMK tasted its first prominent electoral win.

Nonetheless, for many, Madras as a political headquarters was merely a logistical, operational choice, a convenient, administrative centre, with a well-developed infrastructure system not available in other Tamil cities. To a large extent this reflects the behaviour of Indian nationalists towards the Indian capital cities, which were seen as products of British colonialism, and hence a strong inclination to reject them. But in reality they could not turn their backs to these cities. And it was from here that 'the Nehruvian ambition to modernize and develop Indian society was scripted and broadcast, radiating outwards across the villages' (Khilnani 1997: 109). Similarly, for the Dravidian leaders, Madras was the unavoidable hub from where they would begin their acculturation process, spreading beyond the city to the entire state.

At the same time, Dravidian leaders were well aware that cities as cultural landscapes are both the medium and outcome of power relations (see Kong and Law 2002). During the colonial period the British had used the urban setting effectively to extol the virtues of imperial image making via prominent building projects and the display of symbols of colonial might (Metcalf 1984). In the postcolonial era, nationalist leaders understood well its value, with the urban landscape offering an opportunity to convey particular historiographies (Alley 1997). This involved changing the names of roads and buildings from their British references to Indian leaders, and ridding the landscape of colonial icons including monuments and statues (Figure 13). Larger colonial structures

and buildings however remained, and after a simple corrective exercise of renaming, leaders moved into these structures using them as centres of the new governments.

Figure 13: RK Laxman, *The Times of India* on the politics of name change



It is a waste of space to give this road only one name; it is a pretty long road and could be named after three of our past heroes!

You will be pleased to know, sir, that we have renamed them all after the heroes and heroines of our nation!

Source: Left – Laxman (2004: 38); Right – Laxman (1990: 128)

Thus, the Fort St. George in Madras, transferred from being the centre of British administration of the Madras Presidency to accommodate the legislative assembly and secretariat of the new state government. The exercise then moved to the next level where the public sphere was repopulated with statues, monuments and memorials, all attempting to narrate a particular version of history and identity. This technique was prominently employed by the Dravidian leaders in fixing a Tamil tag to Madras. When the DMK took control in 1967, the power of spatialising history and popular memory was implemented at its fullest potential. The landscape of Madras was refitted with material structures and icons to communicate a political transformation in which the regional self is simultaneously purged of the colonial and national other.

4.2.2 Identity rhetoric: symbols and 'sets' in the city

The DMK government sought to construct and reify a selective vision of the past through a spatio-temporal marking, one that helped to project Tamil cultural nationalism into the practices of everyday life.⁷⁵ Spatially, the grand plan was to dot important sites within the entire geography of Tamil Nadu with monuments that commemorated the Tamil past (Srivathsan 2006, 2000). In Madras, besides renaming the streets and buildings with that of Tamil heroes, on the occasion of the 1968 second International Tamil Conference, statues of ten writers and scholars who contributed to Tamil language and literature were installed on the Marina beachfront (Pandian 2005; Srivathsan 2000). As 'geography is not simply the "incidental material backdrop" for memory but plays an active role in constructing the meaning of commemoration' (Alderman 2000: 675), the urban landscape became significant for developing a socio-political identity associated with the invocation of a Tamil past. But it was done in a superficial manner where all civic projects simply involved either the raising of statues or building of monuments, not more.⁷⁶

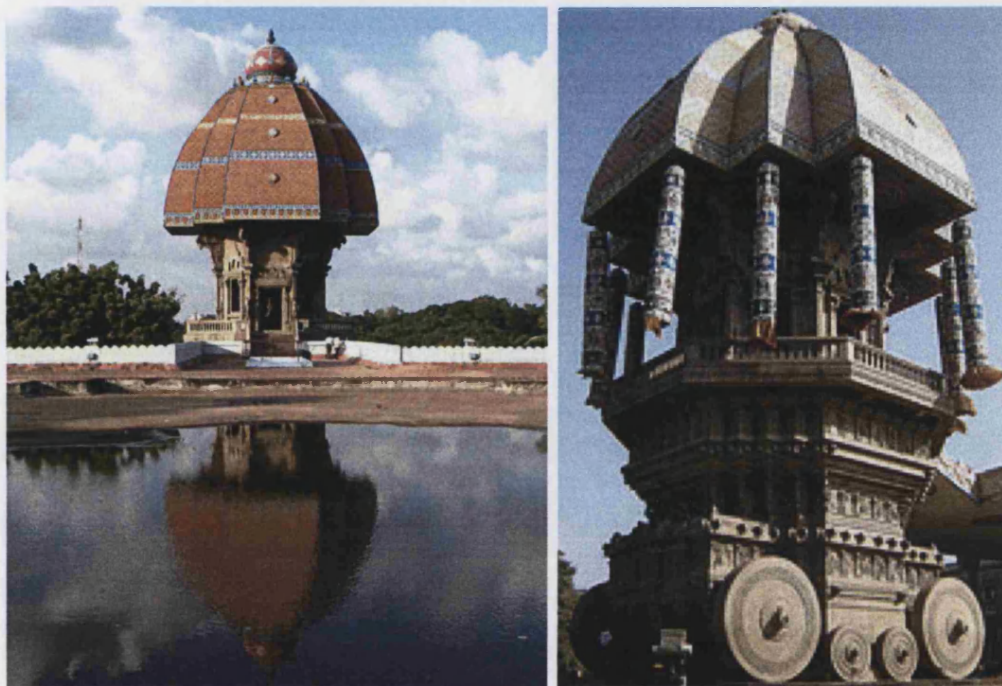
One prominent civic project was the construction of *Valluvar Kottam*, conceived as a memorial to the Tamil saint Thiruvalluvar, a public hall, and a research and learning centre (Srivathsan 2006; Figure 14). Interestingly, the site chosen was a seasonal irrigation lake which was drained out for this development. The government also decided to relocate a popular private school located on the edge of this lake to another site, a dedicated open space/park within a prominent public housing development (KK Nagar). Development issues like safeguarding open spaces and protecting important water bodies

⁷⁵ Temporally, the day after Pongal festival in mid-January (a harvest festival with secular Tamil connotations) was declared as Thiruvalluvar Day, a state holiday. Similarly, birthdays of Dravidian leaders like Periyar are celebrated with much fanfare as key moments in Tamil history.

⁷⁶ It should be noted that such interventions carry much political currency even today. The removal of one of the ten statues, that of Kannagi, a fiery female character from a Tamil epic and an epitome of Tamil feminism, by the ADMK government in 2001 caused much controversy, and when Karunanidhi and his DMK party came back to power in 2006, his first action was to reinstate the statue amidst much fanfare (see Pandian 2005).

seemed trivial when compared to the larger need of establishing a Tamil cultural identity.

Figure 14: Valluvar Kottam, Chennai



Source: © Shiva, retrieved from www.flickr.com on 10 August, 2008.

Dominated by personality-driven leadership, Dravidian politics employed the city as a discursive space to literally stage the projection and glorification of the leaders and their party ideals. The city was seen as a prop from which large cut-outs, hoardings, advertisement boards, banners and flags dominate the townscape overwhelming the buildings and permanent structures (Figure 15). It is a large performance space to celebrate the cult-like status of the leaders, a space for the parties to stage their spectacles. There is an undeniable dimension of temporality to the imagination of the city and its spaces: most public spaces wallow in neglect for a large part of the year, only to come alive during periodic occasions such as birthdays of the party leaders and party anniversaries/annual conferences when they become an essential accessory to the celebrations. Accordingly, they are cleaned, decorated and prepared for enacting the festivities.

Figure 15: Reel and real aspects of Dravidian politics



Source: www.flickr.com, retrieved 10 August, 2008; a billboard celebrating Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M Karunanidhi's golden jubilee in politics hangs precariously from a dilapidated building

Rajadurai and Geetha (1996) call this simulative tendency as 'cinematisation', as the public spaces came to represent cinematic interiors, a kind of a proscenium stage for the dissemination of party ideals but not more. This is not surprising given the critical role of cinema in Tamil politics, serving as a serious vehicle of political mobilisation for the Dravidian parties in the 1950s and 1960s and served as an effective propaganda machine. Many of the Dravidian party leaders began their careers in films, either as writers or actors. The last five chief ministers in the state have had film connections (Hardgrave 1971; Dickey 1993), and this has probably influenced the way they conceive the city as a 'reel' rather than 'real' space for enactment of their ideologies. Thus, enormous expenditures are made by the state government in staging temporary events like the International Tamil Conferences when it could be 'spent on really constructive projects to better the lives of Tamilnadu's people' (Cutler 1983: 286-7).

4.3 When development took a backseat

Cutler's (1983) question on what are the tangible benefits of such events to the overall development of the city draws attention to the darker side of commemoration practices, where, by making a virtue of its cultural nationalism, the Dravidian ideology was rendered dogmatic, one which could only be realised via frivolous projects like building of statues and monuments. As the Dravidian leaders made flashy and episodic attempts to utilise the city's landscape as a backcloth from which the much hailed Tamil identity could be tailored, there was no space/time for no-nonsense development projects to address fundamental infrastructure issues and the physical well-being of the city.

This stubborn reliance on rhetoric rather than reality soon began to take a physical toll on the city. When the DMK won its first victory in the Madras Corporation elections of 1959, it claimed that its new administration brought about desirable changes in the provision of drinking water, in education, health, road maintenance, and a crackdown on tax evaders (Barnett 1976). But in the ongoing tussle between rhetoric and reality, the DMK could eventually only pay lip-service to its promise of addressing 'real' issues. In the 1968 Municipal elections, when the DMK failed to obtain an absolute majority, there was widespread criticism of corruption in the city administration and a general deterioration of the city (ibid.). During the 1961-71 decade, while the city showed the highest annual population growth of around 5 percent amongst the metropolitan centres in the country, it had advanced little in terms of improving the conditions of housing, water supply, and household income (Box 1). The situation was similar in the following decade. Sivaramakrishnan and Green (1986) find that at the end of the 1970s half of the city households earned a third of the metropolitan average, were not connected to the water supply system and lived in substandard housing, while a quarter were not connected to the sewerage system.

Box 1: Chennai in the 1960s – some grim statistics

The National Sample Survey data for 1968-69 found that 38.5 percent of the households in the city of Madras had an income of less than Rs. 200 per month, less than a third in comparison to the Rs. 623 average for Madras Metropolitan Area, and well below the Rs. 372 average for Tamil Nadu.

Only 50 percent of the housing could be classified as pucca structures (built with permanent building materials) and nearly 30 percent lived in kutchha structures (temporary and dilapidated). While nearly 200,000 families had been added within the Madras Metropolitan Area since the 1961 census, only 31,000 households (i.e. 15 percent) have been added. The deficit of 170,000 houses was estimated to double to 380,000 units within a couple of years.

Between 1954 and 1970, the slum population in the city had nearly doubled from 265,000 to 500,000, and the actual number of slums more than doubled from 300 to 650.

Although the water supply to the city doubled between 1950-51 and 1968-69 from 75 million litres per day to 140 million litres per day, its per capita daily supply only slightly increased from 53 litres per day to 64 litres per day. This was much less than the average in 1931-32 of 110 litres per day. 40 percent of the city was still unsewered.

Source: *Madras metropolitan plan, 1971-1991*. (1971). Madras: Rural Development and Local Administration Department.

4.3.1 Decadent seventies and malignant cities

One could argue that such statistics signify a general state of blight that had come to typify the Indian cities in the 1970s. Writing about Bombay, Appadurai (2000b: 628-9) commented that:

...until the 1950s, it retained the ethos of a well-managed, Fordist city, dominated by commerce, trade, and manufacture....Well into the 1970s, in spite of phenomenal growth in its population and increasing strain on its infrastructure, Bombay remained a civic model for India. Most people with jobs had housing; most basic services (such as gas, electricity, water, and milk) reliably reached the salaried middle classes. The labouring classes had reasonably secure occupational niches....Until about 1960, the trains...seemed to be able to move people around with some dignity and reliability and at relatively low cost.....Sometime in the 1970s all this began to change and a malignant city began to emerge from beneath the surface of the cosmopolitan ethos of the prior period....Jobs became harder to get. More rural arrivals in the city found themselves economic refugees. Slums and shacks began to proliferate. The wealthy began to get nervous. The middle classes had to wrestle with overcrowded streets and buses, skyrocketing prices, and maddening traffic. The places of leisure and pleasure....began to show the wear and tear of hypermodernization.

Kaviraj (1997: 106) talks about a similar urban deterioration in Calcutta, noting that until the 1960s the municipality was able to maintain the public spaces in the city in exemplary cleanliness. But it slipped out of control with refugees and migrants pouring into the city, spilling out of the already overflowing slums into whatever spaces could be found, signalling ‘the start of a process of irreversible plebianisation’. This is described by Chatterjee (2004) as the moment when Indian cities failed to make the transition to proper urban modernity. Chandoke (1991) in discussing the “urban explosion” in the postcolonial world argues that the postcolonial city instead of becoming an indicator of development and a place of diffusion of modernist values symbolises more the spread of absolute deprivation in the *haphazard* or the *unintended* city. Rebuking the postcolonial city as a monstrosity, she describes postcolonial urbanisation as “pseudo-urbanisation” or “hyper urbanisation” whose immediate repercussion has been the collapse of the administrative mechanism failing to cope with the pressures of development (Figure 16).

Figure 16: RK Laxman, *The Times of India* – ‘The haphazard city’



Caught between the pole and the lamp post, are you? Silly man, why don't you walk on the road like everybody else!

Municipal office? Turn right at that garbage heap, then turn left at the rubbish dump, go straight avoiding the potholes...

Source: Left – Laxman (2004: 3); Right – Laxman (2004: 12)

4.3.2 Urban and ungoverned

Even though the DMK had managed to scrape through the Corporation elections of 1968, it continued to be rocked by accusations of corruption and inefficient administration. Finally in 1973, following a major financial scandal, the Corporation was superseded, bureaucratised in administration and placed under the control of a Commissioner appointed directly by the state government (Pinto 2000). The latter established in 1973 the Madras Metropolitan Development Authority (MMDA), a para-statal organisation with a statutory footing. It was initially given the responsibility of interpreting and implementing the Madras Metropolitan Plan for 1971-1991 prepared by the state government. Eventually many of the responsibilities for the provision of services in the city were shifted to other agencies, whereby the ‘responsibility for the execution of development projects and operation of urban services rests with more than fifty governmental, parastatal, and municipal organizations’ (Sivaramakrishnan and Green 1986: 235). In 1978 responsibility for water supply and sewerage was transferred to the Madras Metropolitan Water Supply

and Sewerage Board (popularly known as Metrowater). The departments of Public Works, Highways and Rural Works, Education and Health, and Social Welfare remain the principal state agencies responsible for the administration of the main urban services, while all new investment is undertaken by state departments and enterprises.

Sivaramakrishnan and Green (1986) have assessed well the limitations of the MMDA within the context of urban governance in Madras. They clarify that the MMDA's principal function was initially to oversee land and urban development planning via the preparation of master plans and development plans, with some executive responsibilities such as the urban development projects sponsored by the World Bank. The MMDA also supervises the execution of multi-sectoral programmes but without any financial or administrative control. The MMDA itself lacks a significant source of revenue except for a small development cess (a surcharge on municipal taxes) and contributions by local authorities. Though there were expectations that it would reform local government finances and prepare a capital budget for the Metropolitan Area, it only undertakes non-statutory capital budgeting and monitoring tasks on behalf of the state Finance Department. In effect, the role of local government institutions in metropolitan management has since then become marginal as metropolitan priorities are set by the Tamil Nadu government on the advice of a techno-administrative institution (the MMDA) and in consultation with either its own ministries or with other techno-administrative institutions, all appointed by itself. The master plans of MMDA are subject to approval from a multiplicity of other organisations who exercise control over the development thus causing delay and increasing costs.⁷⁷ More worryingly, with the suspension of the Corporation as an elected body, urban management in Madras failed to resolve the fundamental issue of

⁷⁷ Even as the first master plan for the period 1971-1991 hardly made much headway, a second master plan was prepared for 1991-2011. Issued as a draft in 1995, the government failed to adopt it, thereby stalling the implementation of several schemes. In 2006, the DMK government scrapped this plan and asked for a new draft to be prepared. Released for consultation in 2007, this revised second master plan is currently awaiting approval from the state.

representative government.

Thus the city's physical and social infrastructure continued to stagnate or deteriorate in the absence of a proactive local government. While the discredited Madras Corporation still retained some primary functions such as the development and maintenance of roads, drainage, street lighting, and solid waste disposal, its budget hardly allowed for its efficient functioning. Until 1976-77, the Corporation consistently incurred annual deficits on its current account. The state exercises substantial control over the budget of the Corporation, including fares and borrowings. The Corporation exerts a very limited influence, with its own tax sources contributing only 38 percent of its revenue in 1995-96, compared to Bombay which raised 83 percent of its revenue on its own (Table 4). From 1977-78 to 1981-82, the infrastructure investment in the Metropolitan Area accounted for about 13 percent of the total infrastructure investment in the state during the five-year period. That the Madras Corporation accounted for only 9.5 percent of the investment while close to 40 percent of the investment was incurred by the state government tells a lot about the financial capability of this body (MMDA 1995). This status quo however changed in the 1990s following the decision of the Central Government in 1991 to implement economic reforms. This official initiation of neoliberalisation in addition to other structural political changes have had major ramifications for the way the Dravidian governments in Tamil Nadu approached the development of the state and the role of Madras as a capital city in the process.

Table 4: Comparison of municipal budgets (1992-93)

	Ahmedabad	Bangalore	Chennai	Mumbai	Pune
Actual revenue income (in Rs. crores)	198.9	144.3	133.3	911.3	107.8
Actual revenue expenditure (in Rs. crores)	199.8	120.5	107.7	1005.6	110.3
Per capita revenue expenditure (Real in Rs.)	288.9	138.9	108.7	351.8	266.8
Revenue from own sources, 1995-96 (in %)	80	61	38	83	74
City revenue as a share of state revenue (in %)	3.4	2.7	1.9	8.4	1.0

Source: Sekhar and Bidarkar (1999)

4.4 Neoliberalisation and changing tides

As mentioned earlier, in 1991, the Congress-led minority government at the Centre launched a radical New Economic Policy (NEP) grounded in a reform trinity popularly known as liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation. The Indian Planning Commission and its Five Year Plans launched in 1950 had traditionally been geared towards the ideal of import-substitution industrialisation based on public investments in long-term capital-intensive projects. But the unchanging slow aggregate growth rate of the Indian economy at 3.5 percent from 1960 to 1985 (the Hindu rate of growth), and the failure of this economic policy in terms of stemming regional growth disparities and achieving distributive justice, called for a reconsideration of this policy in the 1980s. After the balance of payments crisis in 1990-91, the government implemented the economic reforms in earnest. These included the dismantling of the industrial licensing regime, opening up public sector industries to private participation and foreign direct investment (FDI), and removal of inhibitive trade policies, creating an environment of liberalised trade (including removal of restrictions on import, customs tariff, deregulation of interest and exchange rates, and restructuring of the capital account).

An interesting aspect of the 1991 economic reform process is that it did not come through Parliamentary approval, and neither did it consult the states in its implementation (Naganathan 2002). Rather, the onus of implementing the reforms was on the regional governments. This was not due to any punctilious commitment to the principle of decentralisation, but an uncanny political realisation that it was wiser to let regional politicians appear responsible for implementing unpopular economic measures linked with liberalisation (Khilnani 1997). An unexpected outcome was the strengthening of political subnationalism through economic globalisation (Chakravorty 2000). In this process, regional states have emerged as important actors mediating the process of adjustment and institutional changes with their role in attracting foreign capital acquiring independent value (Sinha 2005). The chief ministers of all major Indian states, in this context, have been actively involved in seeking investments, and almost all have led delegations overseas to advertise the investment merits of their respective states.

Sinha (2005) explains that liberalisation enhanced the role of regional governments in three distinct ways.⁷⁸ Firstly, the covert role played by the state became more visible to investors, policy makers and scholars. Secondly, the state institutions tried to adapt the new economic policy to suit their specific regional conditions, relevant to their provincial realities. And thirdly, regional states found themselves engaging in administrative reform, initiating new rules and policies in the midst of a regulation vacuum created by the withdrawal of the central state. She highlights the fact that while globalisation and liberalisation have offered the leaders of the regional states opportunities to re-emphasise their provincial interests, there is another important reason for the emergence of regional rulers as economic power-seekers in the neoliberal era: the changing profile of the central government, where the formation of regional coalition governments at the centre have led to the incorporation of strong

⁷⁸ At the same time, she clarifies that it is historically inaccurate to characterise this renaissance of the regional states as a product of the 1991 policy changes. According to her, such actions have deeper historical roots, and she cautions against viewing 1991 as a radical moment as many believe it to be (see Rodrik and Subramanian 2004; Nayar 2006; Nayyar 2006).

regional elements in the government itself since the 1990s. This has already been noted in *Chapter One*.

4.4.1 Tamil Nadu's economic renaissance

The trend of regionalised coalition governments at the centre implies that many of the central ministry portfolios are held by representatives of regional or state parties who pursue the developmental interests of their regional states aggressively. Sinha (2005) cites Tamil Nadu as an example, where the regional Dravidian government used its national presence in the coalition government to harness the opportunities of liberalisation for the benefit of the state, and thus bringing a turnaround in the state's economic fortunes. In 1991 when the reforms were first launched, the ADMK government was in alliance with the central Congress ministry and exploited the linkage to launch a regional strategy of liberalisation. In 1996 when the DMK government came to power, there was again a coalitional arrangement with the new central government with influential portfolios, like industry and commerce, given to DMK MPs who played a crucial role in directing investment toward Tamil Nadu.

In 2001, when the ADMK government returned to power, Tamil Nadu was emerging as one of the prime destinations for foreign investment among Indian states (third largest in India according to Tewari 2000; also see Ramachandran and Goebel 2002; Sachs et al. 2002). Unlike the dismal economic performance of the 1967-1991 Dravidian regime, there was a radical shift in the post-liberalisation Dravidian politics and its economic mission. By 1998, the share of the state in the country's total investment stood at 10 percent, as against 4.8 percent in 1991 (Sinha 2005). More recently, the Tamil Nadu government website estimates that this share is now between 11 and 12 percent, the highest share recorded by the state since 1970.⁷⁹ Tamil Nadu at the turn of the millennium represented about 11 percent of India's GDP and 15 percent of its exports (Maclay 2000). Institutional reform, aggressive

⁷⁹ See <http://www.tn.gov.in>. Retrieved 28 May, 2007.

promotion of the state to the media and to private investors, and the use of influence at the Centre to attract foreign and domestic investment have played a significant role in the transformation of Tamil Nadu from a middle-range state during the pre-liberalisation period to a state having one of the highest shares of investment flows after 1993.⁸⁰ Tamil Nadu, in fact, has completely revamped its image from that of a corrupt and entrepreneurially inward state to an enterprising one that is oriented towards the free market in a competitive and globalised environment (Sinha 2005).

In this aspect, liberalisation has in a counterintuitive manner made the regional states even more sensitive to their provincial boundaries. In a quirky way, the neoliberal agenda has come to suit the taste of Dravidian leaders who have taken to this exercise with much relish. One possible explanation is that global pursuits are compatible with the personality cult status of the regional leaders in states like Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. Neoliberal economic activities satiate the ego of regional politicians who wish to display the recent economic success as an extended benefit of their patronage politics.


Lobbying the investors on behalf of the state, politicians like Karunanidhi or Jayalalithaa in Tamil Nadu and Chandrababu Naidu in Andhra Pradesh seem to imply that it is due to their charismatic personality that they are able to woo investors to the state. On 21 February 2004, a bold two-page spread advertisement appeared in *The Economist* under the title 'Tamil Nadu – Your reasons to invest in India' (Figure 17). Carrying a picture of the Chief Minister Jayalalithaa and underlining her vision of making Tamil Nadu 'the Numero-Uno state in the country in all spheres', the advertisement sought to emphasise several things. It clearly indicated that Tamil Nadu was seeking its economic prosperity on its own terms, and secondly it linked it to the successful entrepreneurial skills of an enterprising Chief Minister who was

⁸⁰ Based on reports published on Tamil Nadu's economic performance by the Centre for International Development, Harvard University. <http://www.cid.harvard.edu/india/papers.htm>. Retrieved 28 May, 2007.

luring potential foreign investors. The upbeat manner of this advertisement is reminiscent of the 'cut-outs and hoardings' culture of the state politics where banners are employed to announce unsubtly the significant achievements of the leaders.

Figure 17: Tamil Nadu – The state of today's India,
The Economist, 21 February, 2004

ADVERTISEMENT



'My dream is to make Tamil Nadu the Numero Uno state in the country in all spheres.'

*Union Secretary by
Dr. J. Jayalalitha
Former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu*

Tamil Nadu

The State of today's India

Visitors to Tamil Nadu contend to have completely changed to a certain 'pep' or 'un pep'. Here traditional South Indian simplicity and non-ostentatious values blend over to suit with a steady tendency to achieve unbridled leadership. The benevolent invariably offers diverse assistance (an ancient custom), broadening medical coverage, world class health care, progress in research even to far as the United Kingdom and investment opportunities which have already commenced a number of leading international parties to enable Tamil Nadu their global home.

What makes Tamil Nadu such a clean favourite?

Consider these facets:-

- Tamil Nadu is the uncontroverted leader in availability of **Skilled Manpower** - thanks to quality and quantity. Chennai, the capital of Tamil Nadu, is the Centre of India with a thriving non-computer industry, and IT, ITES, Phosphate and bio-phosphate centres as well.
- Chennai is the most efficient computer port in India.
- Tamil Nadu is connected in Singapore, and the world, via satellite cables delivering the world's highest bandwidth (NOCOT) links.
- Tamil Nadu, a rich natural IT exports of \$1.6 billion, has the highest IT exports every month with more than 1,000 IT companies employing over 85,000 professionals.

Indian and international visitors alike have made Tamil Nadu their preferred investment destination. But how did Tamil Nadu get there?

The 7 Ps of investing that make Tamil Nadu an irresistible investment destination

People - With over 40 lakh engineering talent in Chennai, more than 100,000 IT professionals, Tamil Nadu produces over 75,000 engineering graduates and 41,000 technicians every year. Because of its rich heritage and long history of

ADVERTISEMENT

that we looked at locations all over India for our car project, Tamil Nadu really came out to the top of the list."

*Mr. David Friedman,
Vice President, Ford India Pvt Ltd*

And, Tamil Nadu is not India's largest or most urban IT park. TIDEL is not located in Chennai. TIDEL has been set up in one of the world's most respected IT zones like Computer Automation, EDS, Ford Business Solutions, Watson, Infocube, In Analytics and many more. The TIDEL IT park and the Mahabales Industrial Park are vibrant symbols of Tamil Nadu's commitment to excellence and its unbridled entrepreneurial spirit.

Infrastructure

Tamil Nadu is the only state in India to accommodate an immense range of facilities from facilities to small and everything in between, including airports, canals, roads, earth-moving equipment, trucks and even toll machines!

Over 100% of non-computer services are applied, health, education, government & public services. Tamil Nadu is a world of Indian experts to from the State. Power and water cost 1/3rd more in Europe are more than 100% in Tamil Nadu.

The World Bank chose Chennai to set up its only back office services worldwide. Multinationals like Standard Chartered, Citibank and ADB (ABN) also have back offices in Chennai, while Citibank alone alone is an international financial institution. The State Government glass plant has been rated in terms of efficiency among the top three plants of its category in 42 countries. The world's first Tamil Nadu became Tamil Nadu India.

Human Resources

Tamil Nadu will facilitate private entrepreneurs in Tamil Nadu that offer excellent growth opportunities and that Tamil Nadu is a market within the top three Indian States in terms of Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) and

Land in Industrial Parks

Single Window Facility for all State level approvals and assistance in obtaining all other approvals

High Quality Infrastructure & Environment Free Zones

Incentives Package

Dedicated Facilitation Committee for Investors

Good experiences that we had with Tamil Nadu in terms of its people, its Government, its bureaucracy have really been responsible for us to decide on further Plant expansion at an investment in excess of US \$ 100 million over the next three years.

*Mr. S. Senthikumar,
MD, Sankar Chemical Glass India, France*

The good experiences that we had with Tamil Nadu in terms of its people, its Government, its bureaucracy have really been responsible for us to decide on further Plant expansion at an investment in excess of US \$ 100 million over the next three years.

- Automotive & Components
- Software Development & BPO
- Biotechnology & Pharmaceuticals
- Textiles & Apparel
- Leather Products
- Chemicals & Petrochemicals
- Control Mechanisms

Tamil Nadu has over 1500 joint ventures with foreign partners.

Political Will

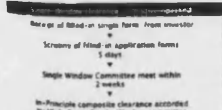
The Government of the State has remained unequivocally committed for change and development. The state's leadership has the means and the will to make Tamil Nadu a global leader. There is a clear translation of vision to ground reality.

Tamil Nadu is committed to participate fully in India's transition from a developing to a service based nation.

Tamil Nadu has and there is our property (Home Office).

Guidance Bureau

P.A. Rajaram - Undersecretary India
Ministry of Chemicals & Fertilizers
Tel: 011-23503304
Email: rajaram@rediffmail.com
Website: www.tamilnadu.gov.in



TAMIL NADU

Your reason to invest in India

Tamil Nadu's efforts in this respect are not unique but in compliance with a universal shift in both advanced and developing capitalist societies where after decades of growing fiscal distress (a condition made worse by depleting federal funds), regional and local governments have had to reorient themselves, away from the "managerial" welfare-oriented approach typical of the 1960s, giving way instead to "entrepreneurial" forms of action in the 1970s and 1980s (Harvey 1989). Sub-national governments have had to adopt a range of activities that are speculative in nature and assume more risk, focussing on the political economy of place rather than territory. For regional states like Tamil Nadu, as they get embedded in a zero-sum, inter-state competition for resources, jobs and capital, this means that they have to reassess and revise the rather tangential relationship they had developed with their capital cities.

As noted earlier, the nature of cultural nationalism practiced by the Dravidian parties allowed them to view the city's spaces only from a cosmetic perspective of 'show and display' rather than address the pressing development imperatives. But since the 1991 economic reforms, capital cities particularly those of a metropolitan nature have come to play a crucial role in promoting the state to investors, and no longer can the Dravidian politicians afford to harbour an indifferent and superficial stance towards the city.⁸¹

Select metropolitan regions are being promoted by the regional states for receiving investment, especially FDIs, resulting in an altered geography of investment opportunities. Chakravorty (2000) observes that the most important structural factor is the availability of infrastructure with metropolitan regions having by far the highest standards of physical infrastructure—power, roads, housing, telecommunications—and social infrastructure, such as health and education. Thus, regional governments tend to emphasise the development virtues of their largest cities. Tamil Nadu state realised the significance of its capital city Madras to its entrepreneurial efforts when in one of the first major foreign investments in the city, the Korean car manufacturer, Hyundai, was offered a choice of sites: Sriperambudur (located on the metropolitan fringe of Madras) or a more inland Arakkonam (which ironically was one of the industrial factory towns developed during the quintessential state-development era of locating industrial developments in marginalised districts). Needless to

⁸¹ The growing role of cities (mostly the metropolitan megacities) in helping developing countries plug into the global economy has been noted by the Asian Development Bank's report on Asia's Megacities (Clark and Stubbs 1996). This has also been acknowledged by the World Bank (Pugh 1995), and in the Indian context by several scholars, starting as early as Turner (1961) and extending more recently to Mohan and Dasgupta (2006). With 60 percent contribution to India's GDP as against an urban population of 27.8 percent in 2001, the role of Indian cities in India's economy cannot be ignored. Also to bear in mind is the disproportionate nature of this contribution considering that the national Indian budget sets aside only about 2.5 percent for urban development projects, while nearly 30 percent is earmarked for rural schemes. See <http://www.indiatogether.org/2005/mar/opi-budget05.htm>. Retrieved 10 August, 2008.

say the investor chose the former with its traditional locational advantages of being close to a metropolitan port city.⁸²

4.5 Rewriting the tenets of urban development

In general, most metropolitan cities in India provide to a select few some of the best opportunities for leading full and satisfying lives, while simultaneously offer to the majority appalling living conditions defined by proliferation of slums, perennial shortage of basic amenities, environmental pollution, traffic congestion, crime and social alienation. Throughout the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, major Indian cities tried various city planning strategies such as preparation of long-term master plans and structure plans to address these shortcomings (Lea and Courtney 1985; Richardson 1993; Angotti 1993; Pugh 1995; Sivaramakrishnan and Green 1986; Gnaneshwar 1995). Most of these attempts fell way short of expectations both in terms of the growing demand in quantity and quality of the product (McGill 1998). By the 1990s, the nature of the master plans shifted as they became important documents doubling as city marketing strategies (Baviskar 2003). This new phase of urban development is an offspring of the new economic policy translating spatially the principles of deregulation, privatisation, flexibility of labour markets to benefit private capital. Civic boosterism is a prerogative as socially redistributive projects like housing and education are replaced by business parks, shopping malls, civic and conference centres (Harvey 1989). This is clearly evident in the development plans for Madras that have been outlined since the 1990s. Specifically, the 1995 draft Master Plan for the Madras Metropolitan Area 1991-2011 acknowledged the economic changes and identified 'master' strategies such as the creation of Madras Export Processing Zone, the 'Indo-

⁸² Jagannathan, V. (1996, 16-31 July). C.M. favours power, port, road plans. *Madras Musings*, pp. 4-5.

Singapore Corridor' and the planning for development of World Trade Centre and National Convention Centre.⁸³

4.5.1 Flagship projects and investment 'baits'

As a part of a 'civic boosterism' strategy, the state undertook several 'spectacular' projects such as its successful bid to host the 1995 South Asian Federation Games (SAF Games) in Madras. The synergies between sport and urban development first became apparent to Indian cities when New Delhi hosted the 1982 Asian Games. This provided the city with an opportunity to display its ability in successfully organising such an event requiring a complex range of infrastructure. It also gave the city a longer lasting physical facelift setting the ensuing tone of development (Baviskar 2003; Uppal and Ghosh 2006). The glamour of the projects involved caught the fancy of the development planners. Delhi was dotted with flyovers, state-of-the-art sports facilities and luxury apartments (doubling up as sports villages), all designed by the best architects in the country, a model worthy of emulation. While in the 1980s, only Delhi as the national capital seemed to have the capacity and ability to organise such events, by the 1990s, regional cities tried to prove their mettle by organising similar events.

Thus, Madras hosted the SAF Games in 1995, Bangalore was the venue for the National Games in 1997, and Hyderabad ambitiously organised the Afro-Asian Games in 2004. Heitzman (1999) picks on Harvey's emphasis on the recent fad for such "consumption artefacts" to explain the stadium syndrome that afflicted the regional Indian cities. While on the one hand they wished to challenge Delhi as the sports capital of the nation, on the other, they pursued this strategy within a plan to attract pieces of global or national capital. In Madras, in preparation for this event, centres for sporting excellence were constructed in various parts of the city. The city was cleaned, pruned and

⁸³ As stated earlier, this draft was scrapped in 2006 and a fresh one was prepared in 2007. It would not be an understatement to say that neoliberal aspirations find an enhanced expression in the latest version.

decked up for the occasion, with banners everywhere. The state was keen to prove the city's ability to provide world class sports facilities. In 1996, the International Hockey Federation's Champions Trophy which featured the top six nations was held in one of the newly revamped stadium. Since 1997, an ATP tournament is being held in the city, only one of its kind in India, in another stadium which was also built for the SAF Games.

Regional governments believe (or are led to believe) that engaging in high-end spectacles such as sports events proves their competitive mentality, and can advance them in the global race for supremacy. Moreover, such events offer cities an opportunity to showcase its wares to international visitors and investors. Little attention is given to the fact that these are ephemeral, high-risk projects that can very easily fall on hard times, and prove a financial disaster (Harvey 1989). But true to the Dravidian nature, flashy set-piece projects appeal to their taste, and they have continued with this approach.

Such projects aside, in another pre-emptive move, in 1996, the DMK, after coming to power, saw in the ongoing climate of neoliberalisation an opportunity to link newer city development initiatives with its own project of Tamil revivalism.⁸⁴ Understanding well the significant role of Madras in the new context, the DMK sought to inscribe a renewed Tamil identity to the city, one which would successfully harness the opportunities of globalisation and neoliberalisation. It achieved the same through a couple of master strokes. First was to rename the city as Chennai. Secondly, by implementing the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, the DMK government decided to restore all local bodies as elected organisations, thereby returning to the capital city a democratically elected municipal government and a symbolic head in the form of a mayor. The importance of a visible local political identity to economically competitive cities like Madras could hardly be missed.

⁸⁴ Neoliberalisation started in earnest in Tamil Nadu from 1991 onwards under the regime of the ADMK leader Jayalalithaa. Karunanidhi continued its implementation when he returned to power in 1996, albeit in his own signature style of combining it with Tamil nationalism. Neither Jayalalithaa's subsequent return in 2001 nor Karunanidhi's present reign since 2006 seem to affect neoliberalisation's pace, which has established a momentum of its own.

4.5.2 Chennai, not Madras: original and new⁸⁵

As already stated in the introduction to this chapter, the DMK government's decision to rename Madras as Chennai is set in the context of a trend in India since the 1990s when many regional governments changed the names of their prominent cities from their colonial 'corruption' to the vernacular 'original'.⁸⁶ Initially, the regional nature of the state governments made many wonder if it was simply a weak display of parochialism and narrow-mindedness. The decision to rename the city met resistance from the Madras loyalists who argued, on the basis of everything from historic inaccuracy to a narrow-minded nativist agenda, that this would only adversely affect the economic fortunes of the city, particularly at a moment when it was at the threshold of globalisation. For those who remained indifferent, the uppermost question was whether the change was going to address the developmental challenges that the city was facing.⁸⁷ What these groups failed to see is that language can be a geopolitical tool that can carve a new spatio-temporal order for the city, and that the name change was significantly intended to coincide precisely with the moment when the city was globalising. The renaming exercise attempted to associate the city with a globalising present, shorn of a colonial past and equipped with a postcolonial postmodernity that allows the vernacular and the global to cohabit within the same space.

In the case of Bombay, postmodern globalisation is not the only aspect of name change. The transition from Bombay to Mumbai has also been linked to the rise of a violent and inflammatory form of parochialism associated

⁸⁵ *Chennai, not Madras: perspectives on the city* is the title of a volume edited by AR Venkatachalapathy. The chapter contribution in this book by the researcher is based on arguments discussed in this section.

⁸⁶ This indigenising toponymic strategy is worldwide involving cities and countries. Formosa is now Taiwan, Ceylon is Sri Lanka, Peking is Beijing, and Leopoldville is today Kinshasa in Congo.

⁸⁷ Muthiah, S. (1996, 1-15 August). A letter to the C.M. *Madras Musings*, p. 1; Editor, The. (1996, 16-30 September). But we're also disappointed, Sir. *Madras Musings*, p. 1; Chennai versus Madras. (1996, 29 July). *The Hindu*, p. Metro 1; Sambandam, V. S. (1996, 29 July). Why 'Chennai'? *The Hindu*, p. Metro 3.

mostly with the nativist politics of Shiv Sena, a pro-Marathi, Hindu right-wing party. While a similar expression of violence may have been anticipated with the name change of Madras to Chennai, given the agitational history of the Dravidian ideology, it was not the case. Rather, this political manoeuvre ensured that the moment of provincialisation benignly coincided with and became essential to the moment of globalisation. Whether it is the case of Bombay, Calcutta or Madras, the name change was central to and integrally articulated with the material transformations engendered by global capitalism (Varma 2004).

If Madras, unable to reconcile the differences between the priorities of the national and the regional, tried hard to make the most out of the state-led industrialisation opportunities but never quite managed to achieve the desired results, today Chennai presents a completely different scenario. For instance, in the 1970s and the 1980s, industrialists in the automobile-manufacturing sector (and the ancillary industries) in Tamil Nadu were considerably frustrated, as they felt that Madras had allowed the regional balance in automobile industry to shift to north India (Sinha 2005). By the end of the 1990s, the trend had reversed. But this time it was Chennai, not Madras, that emerged as a favourite destination of foreign investors in automobile and its ancillary industries, carrying proudly the title 'Detroit of India'. This symbolised an economic success that was never experienced during the time the city was known as Madras (Figure 18). In a rather prescient manner, a 1996 editorial in *The Hindu* writing in response to the concerns of Madras being edged out of the Indian Map by the name change wrote that '[t]he changing face of the city may spawn a new breed of Chennaites altogether altering the image of the Madrasi'.⁸⁸

Since 1996, Chennai is a choice location for several car manufacturers including Hyundai, Mitsubishi, Renault, BMW, Nissan and Ford, the

⁸⁸ Chennai and the Madrasi. (1996, 04 November). *The Hindu*, p. 12.

manufacturing plants of several foreign companies including the glass manufacturing companies Pilkington and Saint Gobain, not to mention the back-office operations of several international organisations such as the World Bank, Citibank, ABN Amro and Stanchart.⁸⁹ In *The Economist* advertisement published on 21 February 2004, there are proud and repeated references to the advantages of Chennai — its human capital (a skilled labour force), excellent transport facilities (including its port and airport), and industrial parks with ‘world-class facilities’ and ‘state of the art infrastructure’. Madras hardly carried such distinctions. In contrast to the languishing Madras Port of the 1960s, the rechristened Chennai Port is considered to be one of the most modern ports in India with efficient container facilities, projected as a gateway for automobile exports, and the amount of cargo handled (import and export only) that is second highest in the country ahead of Mumbai (Table 5).

⁸⁹ KPMG (2005). Indian states: Economy and business - Tamil Nadu. Gurgaon, India Brand Equity Foundation. See also Tewari (2000, 2001).

Figure 18: From Madras to Chennai: An image makeover



Source: Retrieved from www.flickr.com on 10 August, 2008.

Madras was defined quintessentially by its colonial remains (such as the Central Railway Station and Rippon Building, the Corporation headquarters)



On the other hand, Chennai's stakes 'have gone global'. A banner outside the airport welcomes you to the 'Hometown of Hyundai', and billboards across the cityscape display ongoing investment projects with a global architecture indicating that it is not somewhere in Europe, but 'right in Chennai'.

Table 5: Cargo traffic at major Indian ports April 2006 – March 2007

Port	In 000's Tonnes
Visakhapatnam	56,385
Kolkata	55,050
Chennai	53,414
Mumbai	52,364
Paradip	38,517
Mormugao	34,241
New Mangalore	32,042
Tuticorin	18,001
Cochin	15,257
Ennore	10,714

Source: Indian Ports Association; Note: While Chennai is ranked third in this list (above Mumbai but below Kolkata), Kolkata's traffic is handled by a combination of two ports – Haldia (42,454 tonnes) and Kolkata (12,596 tonnes).

Chennai has also emerged as a major hub of software development in the country and its potential to become an IT corridor to South East Asia was recently identified (Bajpai and Dokeniya 1999). Tamil Nadu is the second largest software exporter in India and Chennai's role in abetting and enhancing this performance is critical, ranking first among Indian cities in terms of technology exposure and responsiveness in a 1999 survey by Business World. NASSCOM (National Association of Software and Service Companies) rates Chennai as the ideal location for software projects in India, given the fact that Chennai is a major producer of software professionals in India and has the largest mainframe capacity in Asia. Companies such as Alcatel, TCS, Ramco, Pentafour, Cognizant, Singapore Airlines, EDS, Infosys, and MNCs like Matsushita have set up their base in Chennai. More than 769 companies are operational with over 35,000 professionals employed in over 1.6 million square feet of built-up office space. If Tamil Nadu registered the fastest and highest growth rate in software exports from 1998-2001 (an 800 percent increase from Rs 4 billion to Rs. 31.2 billion), it is largely due to Chennai which has India's largest and most modern IT Park (TIDEL Park, a 1.3 million square feet plug and play development employing 12,000 software professionals and playing

host to the who's who of the world's IT companies including Verizon, Sutherland Technologies, Ford Business Solutions, EDS, etc.) (Ramachandran and Goebel 2002; Figure 19).

Figure 19: Tidel Park, Chennai



While the above information substantiate that the improved economic turn that Chennai is currently experiencing, a more comprehensive assessment of this 'urban turn' needs to be made. Foremost is the issue of whether neoliberal economic policies resulting in the above investments have also resulted in equitable growth and development. While this question remains unresolved at the national level (Datt and Ravillon 2002; Dreze and Sen 1995; Figure 20), institutional studies on Tamil Nadu tend to focus on the merits of economic reform.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ See for instance the reports produced by Harvard University's Research and Advisory Project for the Tamil Nadu Government. <http://www.cid.harvard.edu/india/papers.htm> Retrieved 28 May, 2007.

Figure 20: RK Laxman, *The Times of India*, on India's NEP, increasing GDP and persistent poverty



Source: Laxman (2005: 186)

Thus, a report by the World Bank (2005) associates Tamil Nadu's improved Human Development Index (HDI) to its economic policy, insisting that the state is on track to meet most of the Millennium Development Goals, with a strong performance trend in sectors like poverty reduction, child malnutrition, school enrolment, and infant mortality. Going by this measure, Chennai reveals some cheerful statistics. While the fact that Chennai and its surrounding district has the highest per capita income in the state doesn't come as a surprise, it also shows some impressive HDI figures. Its HDI is 0.757, much higher than the state and all-India average. It also fares best in the GDI (Gender Development Index).

But there are aspects where Chennai fares poorly, factors which are more obviously related to liberalisation. For instance, Chennai's employment increase has mostly been generated amongst the marginal workers as opposed

to main workers, reflecting the increasing informalisation of labour with the rising influence of a neoliberal economy. It has the highest Gini Index in the state (33.3 as against the state average of 28.32). But measuring economic success in terms of poverty reduction is arduous given the difficulty in making accurate measurements (Datt and Ravillon 2002), with different studies yielding distinct figures. Against the Planning Commission's use of the unadjusted numbers where poverty in Tamil Nadu has decreased from 35.4 to 21.1 (with urban poverty reducing from 39.9 to 22.1) between 1993-94 and 1999-2000, Deaton and Dreze's (2002) adjust the NSSO 1999-2000 data to identity a drop from 30.3 to 20.0 at the state level and 20.8 to 11.3 for the urban areas, i.e. it has halved. On the other hand, Kijima and Lanjouw (2003) use a different set of adjustments to paint a bleaker picture: poverty has only slightly dropped from 30.3 to 28.9 and in the urban areas it has increased from 20.9 to 22.0.⁹¹ More worryingly, disaggregation of these figures reveals that urban poverty has increased from 20.9 to 29.0 in the coastal north, the area (including Chennai) most closely associated with liberalisation (Table 6). But since there is no consensus on these estimates, poverty evaluations have remained only tentative.

Table 6: Estimates of poverty incidence in Tamil Nadu

	1993-94 (50th Round)			1999-2000 (55th Round)		
	Urban	Rural	Overall	Urban	Rural	Overall
Planning Commission - Tamil Nadu	39.9	32.9	35.4	22.1	20.6	21.1
Planning Commission India	33.2	37.1	36.1	23.6	27.1	26.1
Deaton and Dreze (2002) - Tamil Nadu	20.8	38.5	30.3	11.3	24.3	20.0
Deaton and Dreze (2002) - India	17.8	33.0	29.1	12.0	26.3	22.2
Kijima and Lanjouw (2003) - Tamil Nadu	20.9	38.5	30.3	22.0	31.8	28.9
Kijima and Lanjouw (2003) - Tamil Nadu Coastal North	20.9	49.5	N/A	29.0	37.3	N/A

Source: World Bank (2004a)

⁹¹ The comparison with urban areas is important here as it is mostly the urban areas that have benefited from and served most the interests of neoliberal economic strategies.

4.6 Some spatial implications: a 'tale of two cities'

While there is ambiguity in these socio-economic fact files, more obvious is the clarity in the physical nature of the 'urban turn' instigated by neoliberalisation. A polarised geography of the city clearly emerges between areas that have benefited from neoliberal reforms and those that have been left behind, resulting in a sorry 'tale of two cities'. Giving an example of this effect in Delhi, Baviskar (2004) recounts the manner in which the city is splitting into two: 'One half is a Singapore-clone, sanitised and policed, where the affluent can entertain themselves with round-the-clock eating and shopping. And curled around it is its ugly twin: the invisible yet sprawling mega-slum that circles the enclaves of the rich and powerful, providing them with goods and services'.⁹² Such a manifestation is visible in Chennai as well, one that takes added significance when weighed against its recent name change. For, Madras becoming Chennai signifies more clearly the city's polarisation at a socio-spatial level where both the proper names now co-exist symbolising two parts of a city split by contrasting physical features.

With a socio-economic fault line emerging between the northern and southern parts of the city (roughly along the Cooum River), the two names represent two distinct realities: North Madras embodies the values of the colonial history that produced it but woefully outdated, while South Chennai carries with it all the attributes of a globalising city. This spatial coexistence of Madras and Chennai is not a recent phenomenon, as it dates back to the colonial period when the former referred to the White Town and the latter the Black Town. What is notable is the quirky twist of fate: Madras once connoted a southbound modernising colonial city with Chennai representing the congested native settlement to the north. Today, the role is reversed as Chennai emerges as a postcolonial, postmodernising global city growing southward while Madras remains arrested in the north as a blighted, former colonial area.

⁹² Baviskar, A. (2004, 30 May). Tale of two cities. *The Hindu*. Retrieved 28 May, 2007.

And they stand not in mutual indifference but in opposition infusing tensions into everyday life in the city. 'The divided geographies heightened by divided names tell the tale of an exclusionary city practising forms of segregation worse than those known during colonial times' (Arabindoo 2006: 37). It also reveals a structural shift wherein the welfare populism of North Madras now known for housing mostly the poor and the lower classes is held in contempt by the bourgeois ambitions of South Chennai.

4.6.1 The unbalanced act of bourgeois urbanism

Washbrook (1989) had criticised the Dravidian state claiming that as a managerial state the Dravidian government could neither achieve capitalist development nor the institutionalisation of bourgeois dominance. But the state's recent urban development policies (since the 1990s), particularly for Chennai, prove him wrong, as successive Dravidian governments embrace the project of a bourgeois state. Ironically the bourgeois project is embarked upon by using a proper Tamil name (Chennai). Associated with the name change and its socio-spatial polarisation is the embourgeoisement process marked by physical purification of the city. In the 1996 Mayoral election, the DMK canvassed with the promise of creating a *Singara* Chennai, a beautiful Chennai, a city that is clean and orderly, in other words a modern, elegant, bourgeois city.⁹³ The post-election agenda was dominated by infrastructure projects and beautification schemes that catered to the city's middle and upper classes and the potential investors. In 1996, soon after assuming power as the city's mayor, MK Stalin (son of the DMK leader M Karunanidhi) announced several schemes to 'beautify' the city, with infrastructure development projects reflecting a conspicuous elite bias. This is obvious in the character of the traffic solutions proposed over the past decade in Chennai. In the earliest instance, in an attempt to tackle the burgeoning traffic problems, mostly due to ill-

⁹³ Hansen (2001) identified a similar mandate for creating a *Sundar* Mumbai, again a beautiful Mumbai in the 1997 Mayoral election. But as he explains, the process of creating a clean, bourgeois city overlapped with the social purging of the city by the Shiv Sena to create a Marathi Mumbai. As already noted, this social purification angle was thankfully missing in Chennai. *Singara* is the Tamil word for beautiful, while *Sundar* is its Hindi equivalent.

maintained, congested roads bursting at their seams, the Mayor's office announced the construction of a series of flyovers, expressways, subways and mini-flyovers at various points in the city. As a solution this was propelled more by the need to shift the image away from that of a languishing Third World city to one that is fast-moving and high-tech, emulating the First World.

The Corporation had a grand 21-flyover plan for the city, which included widening roads at several locations along with a first phase of 10 flyovers, with nine eventually built (Figure 21). While there were murmurs of discontent against this initiative, the flyovers went a considerable distance to satiate the pride of several middle and upper class residents of the city who benefited from this speed-enhancing traffic solution. Despite press queries as to whether flyovers offered only a 'band-aid solution', in middle-class neighbourhoods where flyovers hadn't been proposed, residents and their associations rued its absence, convinced of its real and 'imagined' makeover ability.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Ghosh, G. (2000, 27 November). A band-aid solution? *The Hindu*; Resident interviewee AR-290204-01; Flyovers 'can ease traffic flow' in T. Nagar, Kodambakkam. (2005, 09 February). *The Hindu*.

Figure 21: Flyovers in Chennai



Source: Venkatachalapathy (2006: 33; © Aravindan 2006)

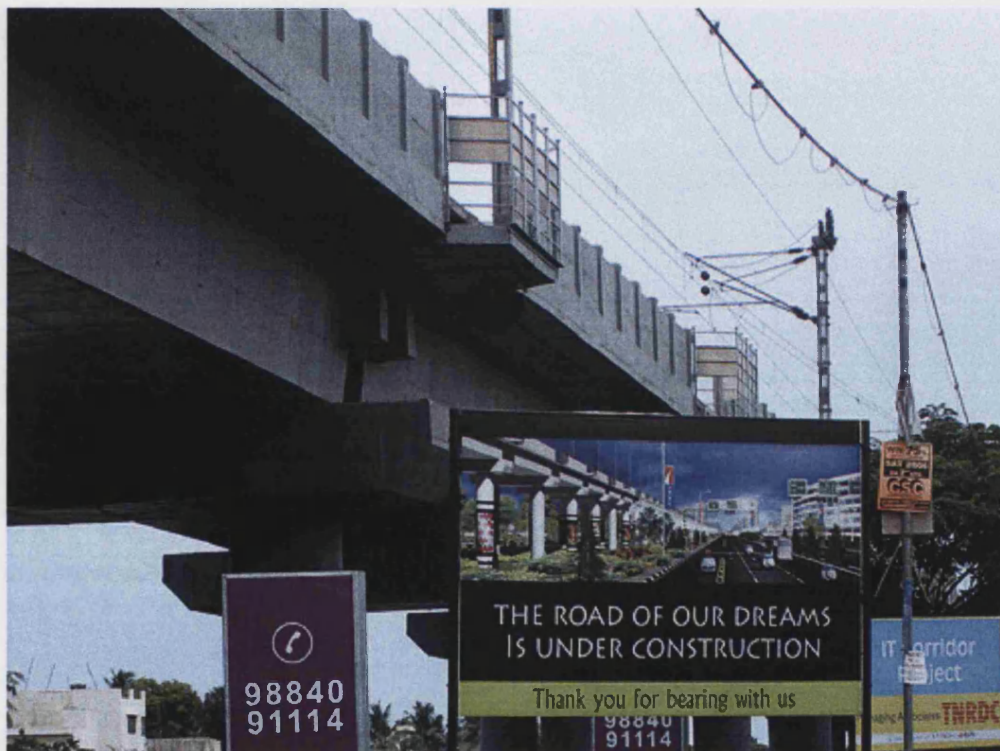
Toeing this line, in 2003, Chief Minister Jayalalithaa announced an impressive Rs. 180,000 million Chennai Infrastructure Development Plan to help reposition Chennai as the best investment destination in Asia. This budget was primarily earmarked by the desire to transform the city into the “City Beautiful”, and ensure that “Chennai is certainly on its way to becoming the most happening place”. In order “to reposition Chennai as the city premiere in South India; as a gateway to South East Asia, as the best metropolis destination for investments in Asia”, the emphasis is on building world-class infrastructure, with a focus on roads, especially of the high-speed variety – flyovers and expressways.⁹⁵ A prominent project is the conversion of the 20 Km stretch of Old Mahabalipuram Road (OMR) in Chennai (housing several IT and business parks) into a six-lane IT Expressway (Figure 22). That the

⁹⁵ Although in all budgetary and public speeches the government insisted that this outlay was intended for a comprehensive development plan including energy distribution, traffic and transportation, water supply and sewerage, solid waste disposal, and housing, the only clear and visible outcome so far has been the redevelopment of the IT corridor to ‘international’ standards, envisioned by Jayalalithaa as “the billion dollar corridor of the state”. <http://www.blonnet.com/2003/03/20/stories/2003032002051700.htm>. Retrieved 23 May, 2007.

transnationalised middle-class desire of 'life on a fast lane' is obvious from this resident's comment:

I look at what they did in Bombay, okay, on the eastern express highway and the western express highway. To me it looks very similar to a large extent to what we have in the greenways in the US, okay. [In Chennai] I mean every single road is real congested. But I have possibly one of the best drives for 25 Km. I go in 35 minutes because I go on the IT corridor. But anywhere else in the city it will take me two hours to go. (ECR-210304-02)

Figure 22: IT Expressway, 'the road of our dreams'



While it can be argued that government spending on roads has a beneficial value to all sections of the society, egalitarian intention of such exercises remains suspect. The high-profile national project, popularly known as the Golden Quadrilateral project, involves the upgrading of existing highways (3,625 miles) connecting the four important metros of Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai to four and six-lane expressways. Started in 1998 as a 'pet project' of the then BJP Prime Minister, AB Vajpayee, this project got good reports in international press such as *The New York Times*, where its mammoth

aspirations were compared with the building of the railways in British India or the Inter-State Highway project of post-war America. The project reflects the grafting of western notions of speed and efficiency, a mechanism to jump-start India's growing global competitiveness, a conduit for even flashier cars, evidence of a frenzied new consumerism, leaving traditional modes of transport behind.⁹⁶ Implemented with World Bank and Asian Development Bank funding assistance, the project is indeed conceived like an 'American-style interstate', built by multinational companies and functioning as toll roads which only the upper crust of the society can afford to use (similar to the ECR example cited in the previous chapter). Ignored though is the fact that the point-to-point high-speed highway pays little heed to the socio-economic network of small towns and villages dotting the routes.

Another example is the development of a Mass Rapid Transit System (MRTS) in Chennai (Figure 23). The project was first conceived in 1984 as a rail-based solution to expand the connections between the city and its suburbs, but took time to be delivered, with the first phase of 9 Km not completed until 1997. Ten years on, the second phase is under construction and a third phase is planned. Today, the MRTS operates at a loss with less than 9,000 passengers a day. Despite a World Bank (2005) study identifying the first phase as being nothing short of a functional and financial failure, it is interesting to note how the state now hypes it from its early image as another tried and tested commuter rail solution to a more upscale mega infrastructure project, one that complements and serves well the IT corridor in the city.⁹⁷ The study comments on the preference of the state for large-scale investment project, and notes that the MRTS line runs along competitive bus routes. It asks if the funds used for the MRTS had been available to spend locally, with operational subsidy also being a local responsibility, would the MRTS have been built? Its 'white

⁹⁶ Walderman, A. (2005, 04 December). Mile by mile, India paves a smoother road to its future. *The New York Times*. Retrieved 18 May, 2007.

⁹⁷ The Tamil Nadu government website on Information Technology Enabled Services (ITES) Policy emphasises that 'Chennai offers a fast track Mass Rapid System for Transport (MRTS) from the city centre to major commercial and ITES hubs along a corridor for 16 Kms'. <http://www.tn.gov.in/misc/TN-ITES-2005.htm> Retrieved 18 May, 2007.

elephant' status notwithstanding, the state remains convinced by the promotional quality of such projects. In 2006 additional infrastructure plans framed on similar lines were proposed including a 300Km Monorail Mass Rapid Transit System citing examples from Jakarta and Singapore.⁹⁸

Figure 23: MRTS Station, Chennai



Siemiatycki (2006) through his analysis of the Delhi metro project assesses the way state officials are enamoured with this new paradigm of a mega infrastructure project. Transport projects are translated into a broader public image for the city, projected as a catalyst towards the development of a modern (read global) city, carrying symbolic meaning and evolving as a 'hyper-branded project'. Boschken (2003) similarly explains that for cities with global aspirations, a highly specialised urban infrastructure is a must, one that is designed for the mass movement of information, goods and people in accord

⁹⁸ <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/2006/02/03/stories/2006020302161900.html>. Retrieved 18 May, 2007.

with the requirements of global connectivity. Stylistic advanced transit systems are a key ingredient. As a result, urban transit has shifted away from connecting all parts of the city, equitably serving the poor and the rich, to one that is synonymous with providing access to economic opportunities, amenities, and entertainment venues of the urban global platform. Instead, the image enhancing features of such symbol-bearing systems are used to reify a city's global status.

Table 7: Investment Plan summary, Chennai Metropolitan Area

Expenditure	Cost (in Rs. Crores)
Water Supply	6,321.00
Sewerage	2,299.00
Solid Waste Management	847.80
Storm Water Drainage	1,423.88
Transportation	17,254.08
Mass Rapid Transit System	600.00
Metro Rail (45 Km)	7,000.00
Parking Lots & Spaces	43.85
Heritage and Recreation	103.08
Satellite Town Development	5,000.00
Urban Basic Services for Poor	3,887.23
Total	44,779.92

Source: CMDA (2007)

Thus, in Chennai, of the proposed Rs. 45,000 crore investment plan, Rs. 4,000 crore has been earmarked for the provision of services to the poor (9 percent), whereas, 17 percent is dedicated to the 'global symbol' infrastructure projects such as the MRTS and Metro Rail. While Rs. 17,000 crore has been identified for transportation improvements, only Rs. 1,300 crores is dedicated to the improvement of bus services. The rest is mostly meant for improving the general road conditions, enabling the private vehicle pliers more than anyone else (Table 7). What is also notable in cities like Chennai is that the modest financial status of the regional/local government means that such schemes

cannot be implemented at a grand scale arching over the entire city. Instead, the state has to contend itself with patchy interventions in a select few areas and neighbourhoods as a 'show window' to lure potential investors, while other parts of the city wallow in a continued crisis of poor infrastructure. Thus, state-sponsored infrastructure projects and traffic improvement solutions drive the wedge further in an already divided city (Figure 24). Commenting on the imbalance in the infrastructure investments between the northern and southern parts of the city, the Joint Commissioner of Police (Traffic) GUG Sastry admitted that:

It is there. I do agree that there has been a focus on attracting investment over the last, over the last, I would say, after 1991, after liberalisation. But in the last 4-5 years it has been more. Something has been done to improve the other parts also. There is a conscious effort which is being made on the part of the government that we should not ignore the other areas. But all said and done, you can see the divide between the north and the south. There is a divide. Not only in terms of ...the moment you go to the north, the kind of traffic you see is also different. Certainly there is a transformation. In terms of the type of vehicles, type of other things and all those things, it is completely different. Like in the south, we still have a ban on the movement of lorries in the morning and then we have the movement in the...some movement in the north and the movement of slow moving vehicles, particularly bullock carts and other things. In the north, there is no such ban. (GUGS-100904-02)

Figure 24: Differing road conditions – North and South Chennai



Source: Left – Venkatachalapathy (2006: 21; © Aravindan 2006)

This, in reality, is not a new phenomenon but one with a historic propensity where the city has been known to gravitate towards the south since its colonial foundations (Murphey 1996; Neild 1997; Lewandowski 1975). In the postcolonial years, this trend exaggerated with North Chennai developing a derogatory image of low-lying areas marked by large-scale polluting industries. It should be noted that this difference has been exacerbated by the urban development policies when a cash-strapped Corporation chose to concentrate efforts in the more viable southern pockets. Amongst the ten initial flyover projects launched in 1997 by the city's then mayor MK Stalin, only one was located in north Chennai, and even this has since been stalled. Similarly when a decision to privatise garbage collection in the city was taken, a seven year contract was given in 2000 to the private company Chennai Environmental Services (CES)-Onyx covering only the three southern zones of Adyar, Kodambakkam and Ice House. Given the 'global' nature of the operation, promising to bring in global standards of maintenance via the expertise of a global company, it seemed as if only the south deserved this exclusive treatment.⁹⁹

Press portrayals note the state's differential treatment of the two parts of the city. Writing about the dismal condition of North Chennai, while one portrayed it as 'a symbol of neglect'. Another projected it as a "domain of the labour class", which had failed to catch up with the bourgeois dreams of South Chennai, and its amenities of a globalising city including amusement parks, weekend getaways, restaurants, Automatic Teller Machines (ATMs), shopping malls, multiplex cinemas and parks.¹⁰⁰ That the global pretensions of the city

⁹⁹ In 2007, the seven-year contract with Onyx terminated and a new contract was awarded to Neel Metal Fanalca, a joint-venture company between a Delhi- and Columbia-based companies. In early 2008, the Corporation and the company promised extending garbage collection services to North Chennai, with one zone, Pulianthope being selected on an experimental basis.

¹⁰⁰ North Chennai a symbol of neglect. (2004, 10 January). *The Hindu*. Retrieved 23 February, 2005; Subramanian, K. (2004, 13 March). A different world altogether? *The Hindu*. Retrieved 23 February, 2005.

have only skewed the polarity further is observed by an editorial in the fortnightly *Madras Musings* which asked if it wasn't

time to pay as much attention to the Ennore Highway to the north, where the "dirty industries" grew, as it is to the East Coast Road and the Old Mahabalipuram Road, homes of the new "clean" industries? While existing infrastructure in the north is allowed to go to seed....the development of the South....has the authorities falling over themselves to please the new investors and those who have, employment-wise, benefited from them.¹⁰¹

It is in the context of these discussions alleging bourgeois urbanism's tipping of the development balance towards the south that fieldwork is located in the southern part of the city, with the study sites already explained in the previous chapter.

4.7 Conclusion

Residents of Chennai who have lived in other Indian cities like Mumbai, Delhi or Bangalore are quick to point out that 'Chennai hasn't quite caught up yet'. There is a clear tinge of envy in their narratives as they recall Mumbai's cosmopolitanism, note Delhi's knack for governance and managing the city, and marvel at Bangalore's 'technological jump' visible in all aspects of city life. In contrast, they find Chennai to be conservative, parochial and stagnant, much like the observations of the city's celebrity writers highlighted at the beginning of this chapter. Speculating on why the city 'fell behind', they invariably blame the politicians for failing to do anything meaningful for the city. As one resident observed, 'they [the politicians] have single-handedly allowed the city to go to the dogs' (AR-160204-01). In a sense such outbursts are not surprising given the middle class's long-ingrained distrust of

¹⁰¹ Why the neglect of North Chennai? (2003, 16-30 November). *Madras Musings*, p. 2. The editorial was responding to a research proposal *Envisioning the city and the politics of development* by Pandian and Srivathsan to study amongst others, the north-south divide, which has a long history but is being accentuated through the new vision for the city. A film *Chennai: The split city* was made by Venkatesh Chakravarthy to complement this study. See also Chakravarthy, V. (2006, 17 August). Chennai: The split city. *New Indian Express*. Retrieved 10 August, 2008.

politicians. As already noted in *Chapter Two*, for members of the middle class, politicians are criminals, corrupt and vulgar, who cannot be trusted with running either the cities or the country.

This chapter attempted to go beyond the rhetoric of the above position, and examined in the first instance, the way Chennai (mal)developed at the 'hands of the politicians'. Chennai's peculiar geography (harsh climate, lack of a natural harbour, and a hinterland with no resources) played a role in its development as 'a city that was not meant to be', resulting in a short-lived colonial glory. Its postcolonial fate was primarily sealed by the rise of Dravidian politics in the region which, in the first instance, attempted to 'withdraw' the city from the national metropolitan platform and redefine it as a regional capital. The insistence of the Dravidian political parties in framing a Tamil geography that could suitably accommodate their claims of Tamil cultural nationalism meant that the landscape of a city like Madras was seen merely as an opportunity to convey particular historiographies, mostly in the form of dispersed symbols and icons. In addition to renaming streets and buildings, purging them of their colonial identity and infusing with a Tamil pride, the city was developed as a 'prop' or set-piece for enacting the Dravidian spectacle. Temporal in nature, this meant that the city came alive only momentarily during such festivities and celebrations. For the rest of the time, it literally languished in the dark side of cultural nationalism and its commemorative practices. In the absence of any 'real' civic, improvement projects, the city's infrastructure began to wear down and by the 1970s, it was showing the strains of a 'malignant' city.

Though this syndrome is not dissimilar to the experiences of other Indian cities during this period, Madras's plight is clearly attributable to the continuous period of unbroken Dravidian rule whose corrupt, economically ill-informed populist practices eventually left the city bankrupt and ungoverned. The decade (1961-71) when Madras registered the fastest population growth was also the period when development seemed to evade the city. This parallels

the acute moment of abandonment experienced by the middle class, disillusioned by state failure (*Chapter Two*). While the 1980s witnessed some surge of confidence in the middle class with early efforts at liberalising the Indian economy, Madras continued to stutter its way through one infrastructure crisis after the other. The 'urban turn' finally occurs in 1991 when the central government officially launched a New Economic Policy of neoliberalisation.

Given the onus of these reforms on regional implementation, neoliberalism has found an unexpected partner in the Dravidian parties as it allows them to refashion their personality-cult politics in new ways. More importantly, there is a clear shift in their attitude towards the city, as metropolitan port cities like Madras have become important playgrounds for enacting neoliberal policies, and hence Dravidian politicians had to revise their earlier indifferent and superficial stance towards the city. Amidst a flurry of civic boosterism initiatives involving flagship projects and investment 'baits', a new tenet of urban development is being written. It is against this trend that even 'simple' political gimmicks like the 1996 name change of the city from Madras to Chennai needs to be seen. The name change was significantly meant to coincide with the globalising present and carve a new spatio-temporal order for the city. But the result is a twinned form of polarisation, where 'a tale of two cities' develops within one, wherein the divided geography reveals not just a fault line between the northern and southern parts of the city, but as well a tension between the welfare populism of a blighted north Madras, now known for housing the poor and the lower classes, and the bourgeois ambitions of a globalising south Chennai, which is the preferred location for the transnationalising middle and upper classes.

During fieldwork, several middle-class residents in explaining their choice of residence in the southern neighbourhoods, revealed that they had grown up in north Chennai, and that this transition amounted to climbing the social ladder, 'having made the cut' as one resident suggested (ECR-250304-02). In such statements, one could also observe the glint of pride in their

contemporary bourgeois environment, comfortably set in south Chennai. But can we conclude that the tenets of bourgeois urbanism as promoted by the state in creating this schism is unflinchingly absorbed and endorsed by its bourgeois society, i.e. the middle-class residents? The next two empirical chapters are devoted to the investigation of this query, with *Chapter Five* focussing on the middle-class residents' associations as a civil society, and *Chapter Six* looking into their involvement in the re-imagination of the public spaces in the city (in this instance, the beaches).

5

Residents' Associations: An Alternative Civil Society?

...it was in a large middle-class colony, typical of the thousands of such hodgepodge agglomerations of buildings that exist in cities all over India. The roads within the colony were all unpaved, and were most certainly unusable during the monsoons. Wild grass and weeds grew unchecked everywhere. At the back of every house lay gigantic mounds of garbage....it wasn't for lack of money that such appalling civic conditions were allowed to prevail. If anything, the blame lay with the sudden plenitude of money: far from fostering any notions of civic responsibility, it had encouraged in its beneficiaries only a kind of aggressive individualism. The colony didn't matter as long as one could obtain, through bribing, through one's predatory prowess, illegal water, power, and telephone connections for one's house. (Mishra 1995: 8-9)

According to the above citation, it would appear that a chapter on collective middle-class participation in a 'civic forum' couldn't go very far. It suggests an insensitivity to the environment and a crippling sense of civic barrenness, as the middle class inhabit a 'hopeless' condition, failing to exert any kind of countervailing pressures. And yet, Chatterjee (2004) believes that there is indeed a movement propelled by the citizens' groups asserting their rights to a healthy environment, calling for a concerted attempt to clean up the cities, rid the streets and public lands of squatters and encroachers, and to reclaim public spaces for use by 'proper citizens'. He seeks to address the question of whether Indian cities are turning bourgeois at last (*Chapter One*), by examining the

efforts of these 'proper citizens' and their terrain of civil society, and argues that since the 1990s there has been a shift in the ruling attitudes towards the big city in India, accompanied by a surge in the visible activities of a bourgeois civil society. This is related to the recent rise of the new middle class, as discussed in *Chapter Two*, and who clearly wish to dictate the terms of their presence and participation in the urban environment. The clarity with which a polity of bourgeois urbanism is being formulated and implemented by the state also seems to be a clear signal of such a revival (*Chapter Four*). It is this context of bourgeois urbanism that makes it imperative to consider not just middle class's subscription to the same, but also the various mechanisms employed by them in the process. As Chatterjee (2004) suggests, this prominently involves the claim of propriety of their citizenship which, in most cases, is asserted collectively on a civic platform.

An established form of collective action for the middle class is their residents' association, and it is therefore normal to expect that this forum would be actively used to develop a dominant bourgeois ideology in making claims to the urban domain. This chapter is one of two empirical investigations of the middle-class articulation of a collective activist position to pilot the changing geography of Chennai. It considers the way the new middle class, empowered by their recent social promotion as young homeowners use their residents' associations as a means of not only making citizenry demands for the provision of basic amenities and infrastructure but also to present a collective voice in consumerist bargaining. Both demands are made in tandem to reinforce their position as a citizen-consumer. Evaluating the extent to which the middle class view such associations as a civil society platform, this chapter examines their politics of partnership as they engage with other residents associations (of all social classes), 'organised' civil society initiatives, and the state. The latter reveals, in particular, the degree to which the middle class engage with the bourgeois urban imaginary of the state discussed in *Chapter Four*. But before delving into these investigations, the next section will first

trace the typological spours of residential development within the context of the postcolonial city.

5.1 Residential morphology of a postcolonial city

One of the elements that contribute to the 'backwater' image of Madras/Chennai (as discussed in *Chapter Four*), where it is still viewed more as a cluster of villages than a city, is its residential morphology, with sprawling, low-density "garden houses" characterising its colonial urban form. Unlike Bombay and Calcutta which had witnessed the fast growth of high-density, multiple storey apartment complexes to cater to the housing needs of a burgeoning population, Madras has remained a city with garden houses, palm groves, open spaces and fine avenues (Evenson 1989; Figure 25). Though Ellefsen (1966) clarifies that this description is applicable only to the areas of European settlements, he adds that the presence of a wide area of low-density, garden-house suburbs was a unique and prominent feature resulting in its generalisation. Over the course of the nineteenth century, this pattern remained largely intact (Figure 26). Even during the first half of the twentieth century even when the pressure of urbanisation was acute, many of these garden houses remained untouched. This meant that instead of densification, the city spread outwards, the lack of sufficient infrastructure notwithstanding (Lewandowski 1975). And this is what the postcolonial city inherited after independence in 1947.

Figure 25: Aerial and street views of Chennai

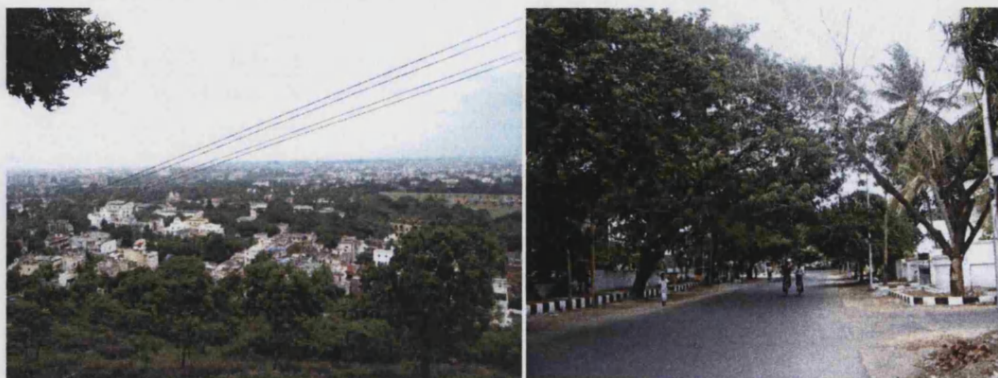
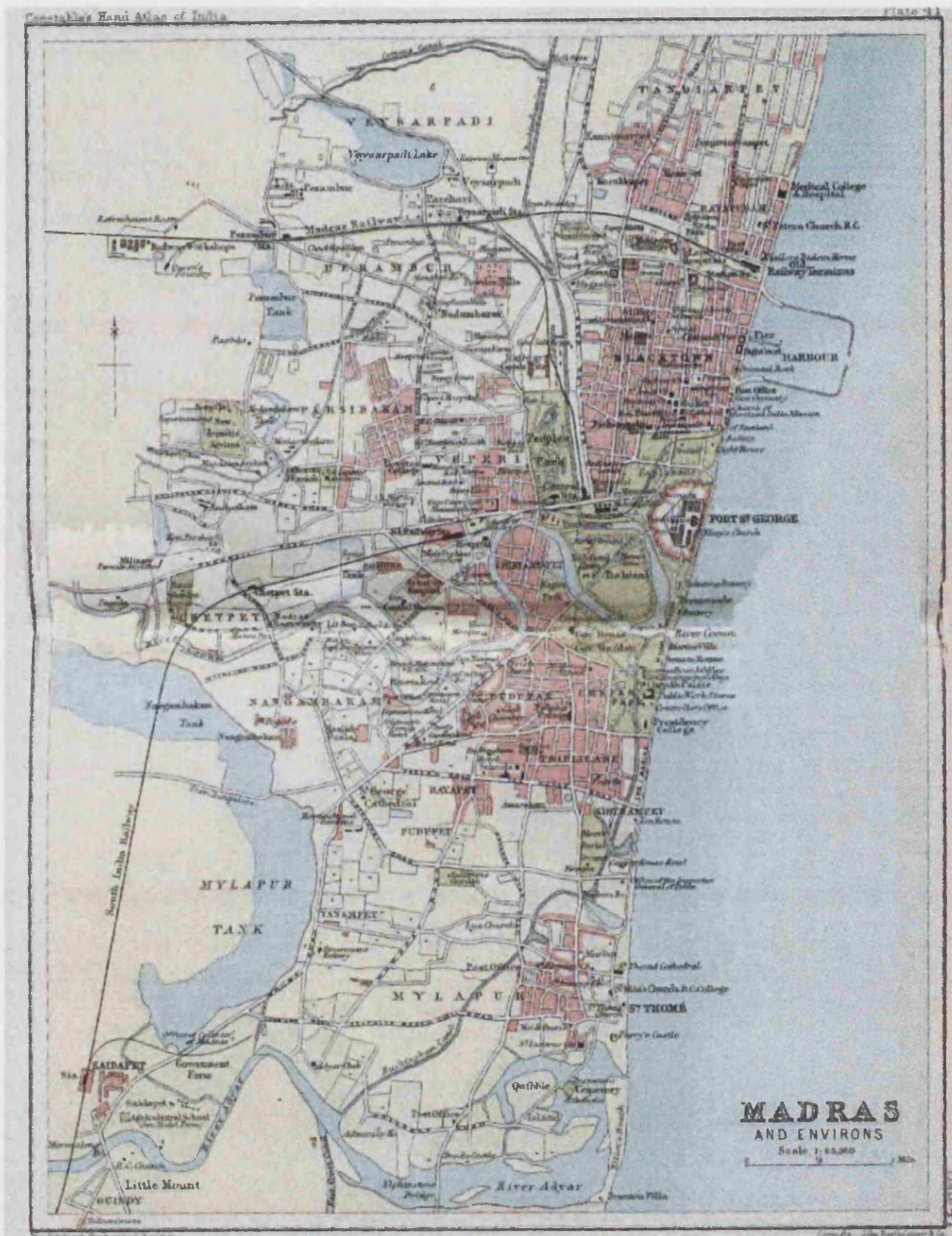


Figure 26: Chennai at the end of the 19th century



Source: Constable's 1893 Hand Atlas to India; Retrieved 28 May, 2007, from <http://homepages.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~poyntz/India/images/Madras1893.jpg>; Areas in red indicate the dense native quarters in between which the sparse European settlements grew outwards from Fort St. George

Faced with the pressure of continuous waves of immigration into the city, and the fast development of slums in various parts of the city, the government constituted the City Improvement Trust (CIT) in the 1950s to improve the

housing situation. The prototype at this time was a 'one house-one parcel' model, of one or two storeys height. A decade later, the Tamil Nadu Housing Board (TNHB) was established in 1961 to undertake the provision of housing throughout the state.¹⁰² By the late 1960s a series of housing development schemes were announced by the TNHB in the city for different social classes, popularly known as the EWS, LIG, MIG and MIG.¹⁰³ In 1971, a separate body, Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board (TNSCB), was set up to take over the activities for slum improvement and clearance, with the TNHB concentrating on the lower, middle and upper middle classes. Yet, these attempts proved inadequate as 20,000-30,000 units continued to be identified as an annual housing shortfall within the city (MMDA 1995).

Every city-dweller, whether a long-time resident or a recent immigrant, and irrespective of class, continues to hold as his/her ideal the ownership of an independent parcel of land with a garden house on it, however small it may be. While in the initial decades, government-sponsored schemes provided such a typology, soon the increasing figures of unfulfilled demands resulted in a change in strategy. TNHB shifted to providing denser, multiple dwelling units or flats constructed in 3-4 storey walk-up apartment blocks, changing the profile of the city. A further propeller came in the mid-1970s, when the face of development in the city was considerably altered by the enforcement of the Urban Land Ceiling and Regulation Act (ULCRA).

Enacted nationally in 1976 and amended in 1978 to prevent the practice of land hoarding, and release land for equitable development, ULCRA's implementation proved to be poor, as a result of which very little land was declared surplus.¹⁰⁴ In an ironic twist, the act proved to feed the very land-

¹⁰² TNHB's efforts are concentrated disproportionately in Chennai with a third of its schemes implemented between 1961-2003 being located in the Chennai Metropolitan Area (TNHB interview 091203-02; CMDA 2007).

¹⁰³ Economically weaker section, lower income group, middle income group, and high income group.

¹⁰⁴ ULCRA was enforced in 64 notified urban agglomerations as a follow-up to the rural version, adopted by some states as a Central Act, and others like Tamil Nadu implementing its own (albeit identical to the national one). A ceiling of 500 – 2000 square metres was set with

bankers that it sought to regulate. With the advantage of various loop-holes, they reinvented themselves as flat promoters, rather than releasing their land to the public authorities for managed development. In the early 1980s, the urban landscape witnessed a dramatic turn in its built form as multiple dwelling flat developments, popularly referred to as the 'night grown mushrooms' sprung across the city with no planning rhythm.¹⁰⁵ For the average middle class resident eager to become homeowners, this was an ideal opportunity. Frustrated with the TNHB and its endless waiting period for housing allocation, and faced with the escalating land prices which made the purchase and construction of their own independent houses impossible, private flat promoters were seen as a veritable bird in hand.

5.1.1 From cash to capital

In the 1980s, jobs in the public-sector were not only fashionable but also highly sought after. This was the period when the old middle class employed in state agencies would wait for decades, nearly reaching their retirement age, to purchase or construct their own home. This is what Appadurai (2000b) might have called as the age of 'cash'. Distinguishing between the circulation of cash and capital, he explains that cash has a more complex life:

It is locked, hoarded, stored, and secreted in every possible way: in jewellery, in bank accounts, in household safes and mattresses, in land and housing and dowries, in boxes and purses and coffee tins, and behind shirts and blouses. It is frequently hidden money, made visible only in the fantastic forms of cars and mansions, sharp suits and expensive restaurants, huge flats and large numbers of servants. (2000b: 631)

the former applying for Class A cities like Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. Owners holding land in excess were required to build housing for the poor on a part of it. 220, 674 Ha was identified by the government as excess of the ceiling limit, of which only 19,020 Ha, i.e. 9 percent could be acquired. With 61,967 Ha exempt, the loopholes in the Act resulted in its weak implementation, and it was repealed in 1999. See Bhargava (1983); Sivam (2002); Pugh (1995).

¹⁰⁵ This understanding of ULCRA is based on an interview with CH Gopinatha Rao (091203), who has written and commented extensively on the post-independent housing scenario in the city. He argued that in its urban form, the Act was a failure, as property prices skyrocketed overnight with its implementation, bracketing out the very sections of society it was supposed to help.

This was also the last gasp of the Nehruvian era when the state was the principal agency for ensuring development, and state employment was considered socially gratifying. Economically though, it meant that one was held to ransom by the circulation of cash, which very quickly and easily slipped into the shadowy grey areas of black marketing and hoarding. The old middle class realised this when they tried to enter the realm of homeownership via the private world of flat promoters.

In a situation where bank loans, if available, comprised a skeletal cost of the flat, payment was often secured through a complicated combination of cash, including one's own life savings and a socially mediated chain of debt from family and friends. This created a fertile condition for the reign of black marketing in the construction sector. As many of the flat builders were land bankers in disguise, their real estate business operated as a disorganised sector sans legislation and in violation of most regulations. Typically, anywhere between thirty to fifty percent of the flat cost had to be paid in cash, meaning that money could be unaccounted for. For a long time, the government refused to give industry status to the real estate and construction sector, for fear of legitimising black money, making this sector ineligible for various infrastructure-level funding subsidies.

With the introduction of neo-liberal reforms in the early 1990s, things began to change. The circulation of cash was replaced by a circulation of capital. Through the benevolence of the proto-global link this allowed the middle class to move out of the raw end of the cash economy into the magic circle of bank accounts, insurance policies, savings, investments, and other strategies. New understandings of monetary phenomena such as credit, mortgages and other financial 'derivatives' entered the Indian cities, opening up wide opportunities for the urban middle class in scaling the socio-economic ladder. Housing was one sector in which capital in the form of mortgage made its entry in a grand manner creating an unparalleled hysteria for homeownership amongst the new middle class (Figure 27).

Figure 27: Property fairs promoting home ownership opportunities



Source: Top left – *The Hindu*, 23 September, 2003; bottom right – ‘Your Home 2003’, *The Hindu*, 19 December, 2003, Brochures collected at different property fair events; During fieldwork in 2003-04, housing fairs were frequently organised by a combination of finance companies, builders, and others associated with the construction industry. It was not uncommon for mortgage companies to approve spot loans, as competitors wooed the new middle class shamelessly.

This new trend of homeownership was further strengthened by a series of other initiatives. The Tamil Nadu Apartment Ownership Act 1994 was introduced in

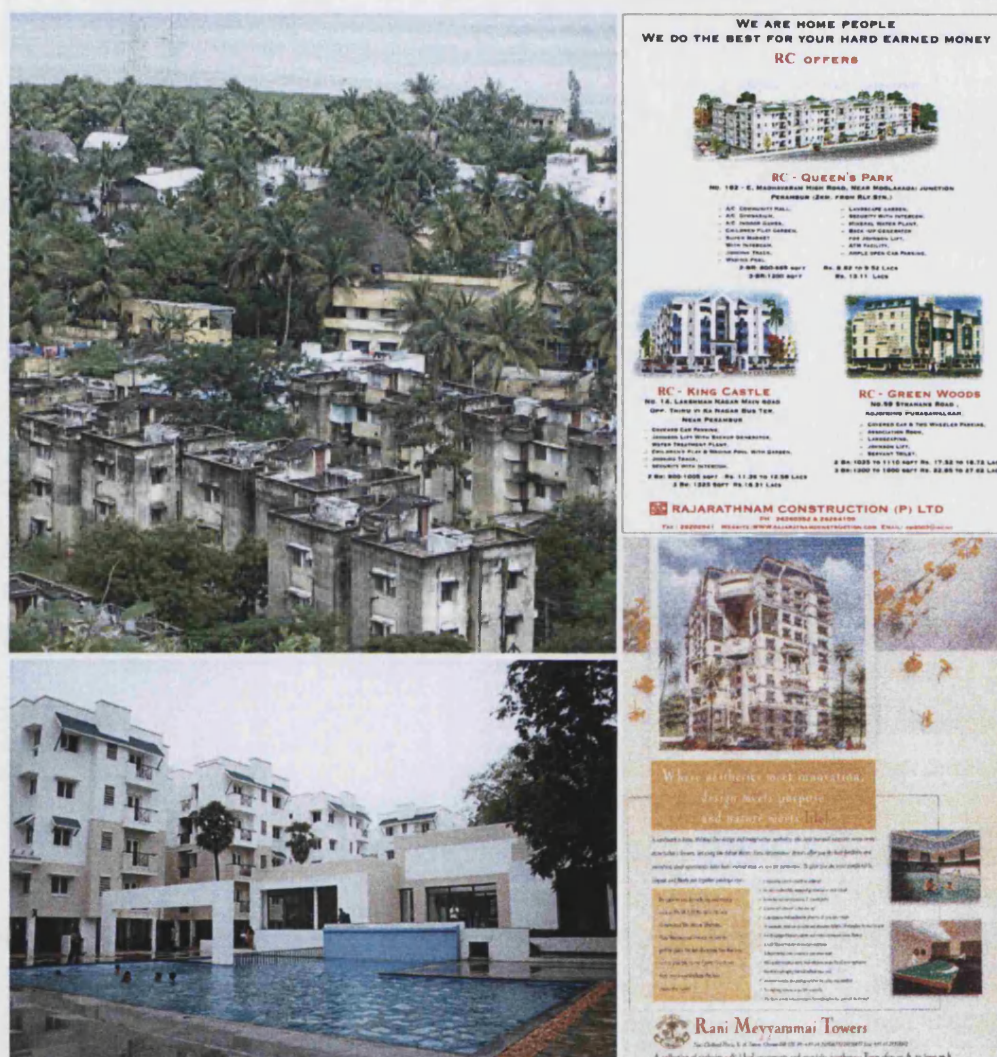
1997 to safeguard the interests of the buyer against the misdeeds of the builders and promoters. In 1999, ULCRA was finally repealed after two decades of ineffective performance. The central government is pursuing a persistent policy of sustaining the economic reforms, attempting to convert India into a virtual deposit and investment zone for transnationalised capital. It announced financial sops regularly in its annual budget for the new middle class.¹⁰⁶ Income tax deductions were announced not only to lure them into homeownership but also to regularise the real estate sector. Capital thus entered the housing scene in the form of lucrative home loan and mortgage deals offered by nationalised banks, private and international banks, and housing finance corporations. And capital, oddly enough, helped to clean the development scene.¹⁰⁷ The new middle class prospective buyers, who are comparatively young, are not in a hurry. Propped up by the transparency of the capital-based transactions, and fed by the transnationalised images of home and luxury, they are seeking homeownership as a lifestyle choice and statement.

Flat promoters in the 1980s were only interested in making a quick buck and were notorious for building badly constructed, poorly-ventilated units with hardly any semblance of quality finish. Because of ULCRA, land parcel sizes were small, and existing development regulations allowed only 6-10 flats on each lot. But the housing complexes that are being built today reflect a complete turnaround in residential living. Rather than pigeon-coops, the new developments resemble 'luxury pads'. The housing projects that are advertised and built to cater to the new middle class are typically tall complex-style development comprising of multiple housing towers w a range of facilities including swimming pools, supermarkets, and play areas (Figure 28).

¹⁰⁶ This is in sharp contrast to the budgets presented in the 1970s and the 1980s where the middle class dreaded its annual announcement, as it was saddled with taxes and stripped of benefits (see Figure 4 in *Chapter Two*).

¹⁰⁷ It should be noted here that while capital has helped to regularise the housing development scene, it has also escalated the value of development, leaving a large section of the society to a harsh realisation that legitimacy is expensive.

Figure 28: Old and new options of housing in Chennai



Source: Photos – www.flickr.com, retrieved 10 August, 2008; Top right – (2003). *A guide to Chennai real estate*, 4(1), 17; Bottom right – *The Economic Times*, 23 October, 2003, Madras Plus, p. 8.

In a city where there are anywhere between 600-2000 builders, and in a profession which was largely unlicensed and unregistered, the demands of the new middle class has helped to streamline the industry. In Chennai today there are probably only about 30-50 builders of repute who can build this kind of complex-style living, and accommodate capital instead of cash payments.¹⁰⁸ Once, where there were builders bordering on criminality and operating in the

¹⁰⁸ Interview with V Nagarajan, editor of *A Guide to Chennai Real Estate* (CRE-201003-01).

shadows, today many are comfortable in the limelight, applying for ISO qualifications (from the Indian Standards Institute) and CRISIL ratings. This turnaround is attributed largely to the demands of the new middle class. This is what one of the prominent developers in the city had to say about their impact:

I have a feeling they have done a great deal of service...they have continuously hammered on the developers that they are looking for some kind of quality and that they won't accept everything. So it is only after they have started buying in the city I think that the developers have become slowly conscious of quality. If the developer is able to accommodate it then a whole range of facilities are being offered. If I am building a two ground [5000 SF] eight flat kind of situation I cannot give very many facilities. In a fairly large development, um, then, you have all kinds of attendant facilities are being offered um which includes, let's say, a gym, Jacuzzi, things like that and a community hall for instance, centralised security, good water with water treatment plant, so these certainly serve as an incentive to the buyer. (KE-161203-01)

It needs to be stressed that these premium projects are not just for the elite, but are really aimed at the middle class who find this new typology appealing for different reasons. A young couple in their thirties, who have lived and worked in Singapore, said that:

As an ex-NRI [non-resident Indian] we have had the experience of living in condominium style developments outside India. We like that, then, you know, we don't need to take the children outside for everything, huh, everything will be available inside. We did realise that in India facilities are provided at the neighbourhood level and when I was searching the internet for flats to buy, we found this advertisement from the builder for this project, advertising a complex style with all facilities. So we don't have to go out. There is gym, swimming pool, kids play area, supermarket, water treatment plant everything within. Of course both of them [complex and neighbourhood] provide the same kind of amenities. Here the quality is at a different level. And for us young professionals, you know, we work lot of long hours in the IT, this was ideal, this was something we were familiar with. (AR-290204-01)

On the other hand, a thirty-something man working in the pharmaceutical sector, coming from what he calls a 'regular middle class' background or what we refer to as the old middle class, said:

...because we have been deprived of so many things earlier when we were at young age...Whichever flat I have been to, we have not seen any swimming pool over there, we have not seen any gym over there. It was still very remote you know, very hi-fi people would have gym and swimming pool that too only in independent house, okay. For me, an

actor would have a swimming pool or a politician would have a swimming pool but now we feel that our own children should not be deprived of enjoying all these facilities which we were not enjoying earlier. So we, though we have missed certain things in life let our children should not miss it. So we thought we can have our house in a place where all these amenities are there, all these facilities are there like swimming pool, though we pay you pay more you get more benefits out of it. (AR-070304-03)

In this aspect many young professionals find liberalisation beneficial, as they are able to dictate choices not just in the purchase of consumer durables but also crucial sectors like housing, a good couple of decades ahead than their parents. Given this socio-economic stabilisation via these desirable residential developments, it is important to understand their negotiations with the outer world, which is mostly undertaken on a collective basis through their residents' associations.

5.2 Residents' associations in a postcolonial city

At the time of independence, the municipal government of Madras found itself precarious in a city making its transition from a colonial past to a postcolonial future. The partisan priorities of the colonial government had left the city ill-equipped in terms of city management, where the limited resources of the municipal administration had been diverted to develop and maintain the colonial areas, while the crowded indigenous sectors were neglected (Neild 1979; Lewandowski 1977, 1975; Evenson 1989). This inadequacy carried over into the postcolonial period, and if residents were not to choke in a system that was reminiscent more of an industrial archaeology than a modern development feature, then, they (whether the rich, the middle class or the poor) had to organise themselves collectively to obtain the basic facilities. Thus, residents found themselves playing a significant role in the shaping of local landscapes, through varying degrees of self-management in service delivery. Each class used their own means and methods of procuring what the municipality had failed to provide. For the upper classes, this meant employing elitist manipulations to ensure that resources were diverted to serve their private ends

(akin to what the Europeans had done during the colonial times). The middle class adopted measures of petitioning and collectively organising their complaints to ensure that their colonies were provided with the necessary infrastructure, while the poor, often living in illegal settlements, resorted to more agitated forms of protests to not only safeguard themselves against future evictions but also to procure a semblance of urban services.

Take for instance, the following account of a long-time resident from a well-to-do neighbourhood in southern Chennai:

...see, when this colony was plotted and developed in the 1960s, most of the people who bought plots were judges, senior bureaucrats or public servants in high positions. They could therefore very easily get some improvements done like laying out the roads, telephone lines, a bus connection.....and what not, you see what I mean. It was all a phone call away. (ECR-010304-01)

Those who exercise the habit of getting things done 'with a phone call' view it as not flouting the law but seeking some form of privilege. Ironically, it is only by 'pulling some strings' that a particular neighbourhood of elite residents living in an unapproved development has been able to obtain funding assistance from the Prime Minister's Village Road Scheme for their local street.¹⁰⁹

Further down the spectrum are the old middle class living in one of the many plotted layout developments in city with non-existent infrastructure. Locally known as colonies or *Nagars*, they were developed either by private or public bodies and purchased mostly by middle-class employees working in public-sector corporations. In the absence of civic amenities, they organised themselves collectively into *Nagar* associations to obtain services from their local municipalities. A former president of one such *Nagar* association explained:

¹⁰⁹ Known as the Pradhan Mantri Gramin Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), the objective was to link all villages with a population of more than 500 with all-weather roads by 2007. This particular neighbourhood in concern being located in a village Panchayat within the Chennai Metropolitan Area was able to claim the funds and as well have a sign-post indicating the same.

I built my house in 1985-86 and settled here after retiring. At that time very few houses were there.....the association was set up in 1981. Since 1981, the association has done a lot of good work for our welfare. Lot of good work they have done. I was also president of the association for about six years and during my regime we got this Indian Bank, (?), Aavin automatic milk booth, temple, post office, police station, so, all the important community facilities so that people need not move out of K Nagar for that kind of things. (ECR-210304-01)

Due to their employment in public sector corporations, these residents had already experienced collective organisation through their trade union membership. They used this experience to come together collectively and bring some respectability to their *Nagars*. But often their patient and persistent petitioning prolonged into multiple back-to-back marathon efforts spanning over many years. As one *Nagar* association member proudly said 'since the 1970s we have written nearly 1000 letters alone to various officials of CMDA, TNPCB and PWD [Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority, Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board and Public Works Department, respectively]' (AR-060304-02). The 'letters to the editor' or the 'readers' mail' columns in any of the city dailies and neighbourhood weeklies is monopolised by the middle-class voices expressing dissatisfaction with the public services, be it telephones, electricity, buses, water or drainage, and hoping that by exposing the problem to the media some kind of 'immediate action' would be taken to address the issue (Box 2).

Box 2: Excerpts from Reader's Mail, *The Hindu*, 28 April, 1997

Culvert on GST Road

Sir, — The construction of a culvert and raising of the road level will no doubt prevent flooding of both the national highways and the Chromepet Government Hospital but we the residents who live near the culvert will continue to suffer. The residents built their houses according to the level of the municipal road and the GST Road. While the level of the GST Road has been raised, the residents cannot be expected to raise the plinth of their buildings.

Therefore, in order to prevent flooding we suggest: (1) The waters of TB Sanatorium and adjoining colonies which flood GST Road should be diverted to the Chitlapakkam lake; (2) The level of other culverts on the 500-metre stretch should be raised; (3) All encroachments on and the blocks in the canals that lead to the lake should be removed.

V. Santhanam, president, Chromepet New Colony Residents' Welfare Society, Chennai

Low voltage

Sir, — The residents of Nanganallur are put to hardship because of frequent low voltage. This adversely affects domestic appliances. Streetlights do not burn properly and have to be often replaced. Besides, the supply of Palar water is also irregular. Many a time, the authorities attribute low voltage as a reason which hinders pumping of water. In view of the increasing number of flats, we request early action for installation of more transformers to overcome the low voltage and high power generators for uninterrupted pumping of Palar water.

M. R. Swaminathan, secretary, Welfare Association T.N.G.O. Colony, Nanganallur

Middle-class forms of collective protest can be ridiculed for their passivity, incapable of triggering a wave of trade-union militancy. When, as 'respectable people', they stage on-street *dharnas* and demonstrations holding banners and placards, they remain one-hour token gestures that rarely develop into prolonged acts of collective action.¹¹⁰ The more agitational and sustained forms of protest comes mostly from the poorer sections of the society who organise collectively in a context where they have nothing to lose and everything to gain. Rioting and other violent forms of agitation are often associated with the poor and the lower classes whose living environments are shrouded in illegality. Whenever threatened with eviction, the residents from the slums and squatter settlements are able to mobilise rapidly, countering with threats of violence and vote repercussions (Box 3).

¹¹⁰ *Dharnas* are a peaceful form of on-street protest where people block the road, sitting, and sometimes fasting demanding redress from the appropriate authorities.

Box 3: Protests by the poor and the repercussion of political society

'Slum-dwellers storm into BMC'
New Indian Express, 28 January, 2006

Around 200 dwellers of Buddha Nagar slum stormed into the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) and damaged office furniture on Friday. The agitators hailing from Ward No. 24, were angry over demolition of a slum and wanted to lodge their protest with BMC authorities. However, when they reached the corporation office, the top officials were busy in the monthly council meeting. Since no one came to pay heed to their demands, they lost their cool and barged into the BMC office. Some of them were armed with kitchen knives. They reached the main hall where the meeting was going on and shouted at the officials and on their way back, damaged some furniture.

'Buddhadeb Government puts on hold eviction programme'
The Hindu, 03 March, 2005 (Malabika Bhattacharya)

The Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee Government today put on hold a programme that, upon full execution, would have resulted in the eviction of about 20,000 people, consisting of about 4,000 families, from railway land across the Rabindra Sarovar, a lake in south Kolkata. The Trinamool Congress leader, Mamata Banerjee, claimed the deferment of the programme as her "own victory." She had set up a resistance formation on a 4-km stretch between Tollygunj and Dhakuria railway stations falling in her South Kolkata constituency. "We did not carry out the programme because of certain concerns which we are going to convey to the High Court which had fixed today for eviction. But suffice it to say, the Railways are found wanting in playing the desired role," said the Chief Minister, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, at Writers' Buildings. The dislocation of such a large number of poor families, though at the behest of the Kolkata High Court which had directed the State Government and the Railway authorities to carry out the eviction by March 2, would have shown up the Government and the party, CPI(M), in a poor light, a section of party functionaries argued. Ms. Banerjee's Trinamool had put up resistance because the eviction programme would hit the party hardest in that the bulk of the targeted settlers are known Trinamool supporters. "As it is, we will have a big fight on our hands if we want to retain the Kolkata Corporation. The eviction, if allowed to be carried out, will make it a very stiff fight," Ms. Banerjee told her functionaries.

5.2.1 From welfare to well-being

In the post-independence decades, almost all sections of the society remained preoccupied with gaining the attention of public authorities to secure their social and civic interests. Under the aegis of residents' associations, the residents pursued vigorously the interests of their welfare (primarily

infrastructure facilities). But since the economic reforms of 1991, there has been a drastic change in the way the collective efforts of people have been put to use. Nowhere is this change more visible than among the new middle class, which has benefited most the fruits of liberalisation (*Chapter Two*). At least, it is in their agenda of collective action that one can discern a radical shift in priorities, with their collective platform expanding to accommodate new interests.

Issues pertaining to civic provisions still remain a priority, but their 'quality-of-life' concerns have been considerably revamped. A relentless hypermaterialisation of the middle class has resulted in material interests taking equal attention. The new middle class homeowners are unwilling to settle in places that are devoid of infrastructure, where they would have to spend at least a decade in innate struggles to obtain facilities. Instead they prefer their homes delivered in a ready-made kit, so to speak. Well-being and lifestyle choices, and not welfare are uppermost in their choice of dwelling now. In 1996, a feature on 'sheltering in style' appeared in the city daily *The Hindu* remarking on the '[m]ammoth building complexes constituting a mini-city or a big colony complete with school, shopping arcade, entertainment centre, fitness centre, gym, swimming pool, garden and parks, fountains and even a creche' having become the order of the day.¹¹¹ Commenting on this changing typology, a young professional who recently bought a flat in such a complex observed that his choice of flat was determined by his need to lead an 'organised lifestyle' (ECR-140304-01).

With this changing environment comes a new framework of socio-economic meanings, resulting in a reassessment by the new middle class of the value of collective presence. Imparting a new interpretation to the 'paradigm of propertied citizenship', their experience of becoming propertied is about participation in the mass consumer market. Driven by a sense of corporatism, free entrepreneurialism and consumption, the 'corporatization of home' is a

¹¹¹ Kalidas, V. (1996, 2 September). Dream houses changing the skyline of Madras. *The Hindu*.

reality (McKenzie 1994: 142), where collective bargaining for consumption gains is normalised as a discourse. Instead of coming together simply to demand the provision of civic amenities, the new homeowners prefer 'collective bargaining for the inevitable goodies' (AR-190304-02).

In an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) of one of these integrated housing development, when the agenda seemed be dominated by the concerns of water and electricity, a committee member called order to the proceedings and insisted that instead of letting civic concerns derail the meeting, the focus should be on a creative implementation plan for the future. He then outlined a road map for the next one year with a list of desirable actions to be pursued. These included waste water treatment and recycling, installation of solar power panels, allocating space for a reading room/library, and increasing the green cover within the complex. He also highlighted the need to build on collective bargaining, whether it comes to service providers like cable TV and telephone, or tying up with retail outlets for mass discounts and promotional offers. Discussing the potential of increasing the revenue of the association he proposed displaying advertisement balloons, hoardings, leasing their rooftop to mobile phone companies for micro-towers, and even renting the complex out for film shoots.

Whether all these items were unanimously endorsed by the residents is beside the point. What is significant is the fact that they are being discussed and debated. It is not uncommon to see retail agencies selling consumer products ranging from refrigerators and washing machines to cars and higher luxury goods, putting up temporary stalls in many of these complexes, with the associations even charging a fee for such displays (Figure 29). Residents' associations convey an important institutional transformation reflecting an ideological shift towards the consumption characteristic of the neo-liberal consensus. The financial empowerment that the new middle class experience is mirrored in the way they run their associations. The associations are no longer run on a voluntary basis, tottering on meagre funds. Neither are they a hasty

response to some service crisis nor are they functioning in disarray. Many of the associations today work with the interest accrued from huge corpus funds/deposits and an expensive monthly subscription.

Figure 29: Retail kiosks in a NMC residential complex



Until recently, associations had generally functioned on an ad-hoc basis, without registering and without an organised attempt to raise reasonable revenue. Today, the trend has reversed with many apartment complexes choosing to not only register their association but also indulging in serious fund-raising activity. Nowadays, when purchasing a flat, an additional amount is paid by every homeowner towards the setting up of a corpus fund, the interest from which is used for the maintenance of the building. Being a registered outlet, the bye-laws of the associations are clearly written, explaining the rules and regulations, the responsibilities of the residents, and a check-list of dos and don'ts.

The suspicion is whether, as a result of institutionalisation, associations will begin to behave in the same manner as other rent-seeking groups in the city. Alternatively, being better organised, there is a potential for the associations to develop a civil society agenda which can extend beyond mere expressions of civic and consumer concerns, and engage instead with foresight on issues spanning the larger context of the city. This can be understood by looking at the relationship they establish with the state and other non-state actors who have a bearing in the fulfilment of their interests. So far these associations have operated in the name of their own welfare without a clear picture of their position or role as a key socio-political actor. To probe this further, the following section will consider the attitudes and responses of the residents' associations (primarily those of the new middle class) in establishing a dialogue with other non-consumer groups, be it neighbouring residents' associations, civil society organisations at the neighbourhood and city level, or the state. This will help map the position of residents' associations in relation to the emerging geography of governance at the city level.

5.3 A new geography of governance

Appadurai (2002: 22-4) notes that the global aspirations of Third World cities are producing unexpected forms of alliances, and 'a politics of partnership...between traditionally opposed groups, such as states, corporations, and workers'. The emerging 'new geographies of governmentality', according to him, is set in a complex terrain of relationship between the state, the official public sphere, civil society initiatives, and local communities, where one cannot be complacent about the traditional dynamics of power. With the state's recent overt operation of bourgeois urban policies, it is important to understand how the new middle class residents' associations play this politics of partnership, how they are defining their relationship with other actors, and if they are able to help 'deepen democracy' through this exercise. Their politics of partnership will be tested in the first instance in terms of the ability of the residents' associations to federate with each other and operate on a wider canvas. At the second level, the enthusiasm of

residents' associations to take up the cause of non-state or non-governmental actors will be examined. And finally, their desire/ability to assume a larger role in governance will be assessed through an examination of their engagement with the state.

5.3.1 Federations and fragmentation

Federations are a central feature in the geography of governmentality outlined by the new politics of partnership (Appadurai 2002). Yet, while federation is a seemingly innocuous concept that merely requires a formalised sense of union amongst a set of pre-existing collectives, on ground, it has often proved to be an uphill task, particularly when it comes to collecting together the efforts of residents. In Chennai, a common complaint relates to the tendency of residents' associations to fragment and splinter in pursuit of smaller group interests. Thus, nearly every colony or *Nagar* association today begrudges the flat-complexes for forming their own associations and internalising their concerns.

Take for instance, the case of Valmiki Nagar, a residential colony along ECR plotted privately in the 1950s. With the establishment of an association, it was decreed that any purchaser should automatically become a member. But with many plots remaining vacant, there was little for the association to do. After the death of the original office-bearers, the association became dormant. When ULCRA was enforced in the mid-1970s, several owners sold their plots to flats promoters. In response to this transformation that brought in a new set of residents (in higher density) to the neighbourhood, a new association was reformed in the early 1980s, but it proved to be a non-starter. As the president of this association said:

We thought we would go another round. The fact was every block of flats that came up had its own association. Their interest was not always the same as the interest of the entire area.....and therefore to have an association which will look after the interests of all these various kinds of buildings was meaningless. (ECR-150304-01)

When asked whether the *Nagar*-level association had lost to the flats, his

response was:

We didn't even try. They overtook us, the growth overtook us. We did try I mean we did do something when there were about say twenty houses and two-three blocks of houses and so on. After that, this growth overtook us. (ECR-150304-01)

As stated already in the beginning of this chapter, associations are mostly needed to address the essential civic concerns, especially that of garbage clearance and street maintenance. In Valmiki Nagar, residents of different blocks of flats along each street initially united together to form a street-based association, overriding the larger *Nagar*-level association. But even this worked well only for a short time. With the Corporation sub-contracting garbage collection and disposal to a private entity, there is less motivation for the residents to collectively organise themselves.¹¹² Also, associational activities such as these often tend to be a first-generation exercise that fizzles out quickly when there is no one to take over. In Valmiki Nagar, the generational indifference is evident:

[t]here is a ladies club of which my wife is a member. There these members are the people who came here years ago. The newcomers have evinced no interest what so ever. Only absolutely senior citizens, old people who have been here for a long time. (ECR-010304-01)

When a woman resident of a relatively new flat complex was asked about her participation in the Valmiki Nagar residents' association or the ladies club she said:

I don't know what collective forum can be there beyond the association of the building. I know about Valmiki Nagar Residents' association vaguely. I don't know about the ladies club. I am sure it is a very personalised thing with some old members who are not willing to hear. (ECR-070304-04)

It is not just the *Nagar* associations who are bitter about this fragmentation phenomenon, but one acknowledged by the traffic commissioner of the city as well:

¹¹² As noted in the previous chapter, CES-Onyx was contracted from 2000-07, with Neel Metal Fanalca winning the new tender in 2007. Since fieldwork was done in 2003-04, all references here are to CES-Onyx, or simply Onyx.

Each residential area, if you take it, earlier it was a bigger area, now every 200 houses have got one association. The moment flats or half a dozen flats come up, each flat....that itself becomes an association or colony like that large numbers have sprung up over the last few years. Like that, that are creating problems and they have their own internal problems of the association and other things. (GUGS-100904-02)

Admitting that there will be shrinkage in their concerns, he was more worried about the limited purpose of these associations:

...there are some associations, some of them we don't know how they are existing, what they are existing for, if only for minimum internal very limited purpose of maintaining their own flats. Their associations exist only for that purpose. They collect Rs. 200/- or whatever it is to pay water supply and to take care of the cleanliness of the place. Beyond that they don't look beyond that. (GUGS-100904-02)

Given this natural propensity for fragmentation and secession, aspirations for federating together hit a formidable barrier. This tendency echoes Olson's (1971) seminal work on collective goods and collective action, which illustrates that non-exclusivity and joint consumption features of collective goods make voluntary actions for larger groups uncertain. Residents' associations are unsure about federating mainly because they are concerned about the extra-burden of responsibility they may have to shoulder. They are well-aware that federations require a lead association to become the *de facto* umbrella organisation that is expected to hold the different groups together. In reality, not many are willing to be the leader. As one association official explained, 'we are not the big brother' (ECR-100904-01).

Nevertheless attempts at forming federations continue to take place.¹¹³ But their main concern is their ability to foresee problems and policy changes. A recently formed federation explained that despite coming together, while

¹¹³ In early 2004, the city daily *New Indian Express* launched an Express Exnora Civic Forum. The objective of this exercise was many-fold, besides the fundamental one of bringing the different fragments of residents' welfare associations under one umbrella. The idea was not only to delegate some valuable media space but also to bring the associations together as a more meaningful bloc-entity and create a reasonable interface with the civic authorities. To this extent, federations were formed in different neighbourhoods of the city and inaugural meetings were held on a grand scale. Since its initiation happened only towards the end of fieldwork, it was not possible to study this initiative.

physically their area of remit had enlarged, residents still kept raising the 'same small issues'. Explaining this further, an official of this federation said: 'you might think that you have enlarged your canvas. But people, they still prefer to think in compartments. They don't want to go outside of their square' (AR-040304-02). Also, they found that residents' associations still retain their original characteristic of gathering themselves in response to a crisis rather than acting in anticipation and irrespective of crises. As a result they are unable to engage with the larger issues of the city. Thus, federations that had been formed in earlier conditions as a response to a specific crisis found themselves disbanded immediately afterwards, exhausted by their own efforts.

ECR Federation: running out of steam¹¹⁴

One of the earliest example of a federation of residents' associations was formed in the 1984. Called as the Federation of Welfare Associations of East Coast Road (ECR Federation hereafter), it gathered together all the associations from Thirvanmiyur to Uthandi (the neighbourhoods running along the ECR) to address collectively several issues. Their prime concern was a government order that was passed in the mid-1970s prohibiting the construction of houses along the coastal roads. Many residential plots had already been sold (mostly to the middle class) prior to this regulation, and the owners feared that they wouldn't be able to construct their houses hereafter. The federation made a representation to the government, and filed a writ petition in the High Court. Judgement was passed in their favour and, encouraged by this success, the federation used its collective prowess to procure basic infrastructure services for the middle-class colonies.

In the early 1990s, the federation proved to be a powerful voice again, when the city was reeling under an acute water shortage. Looking for new sources, the official water supply and management body, Metrowater, dug a

¹¹⁴ This section is based on an interview with the president of this federation (ECR-070404-01).

series of bore-wells along the southern coastal belt where water was abundant and of good quality. ECR Federation rallied against this exploitation of their settlement stretch, and even though they understood that their opposition was denying the rest of the city a crucial supply, they argued that this operation spurred illegal activities in the private sector, creating what is now commonly referred to as the 'water mafia'. Their efforts have been futile on this issue as the ECR belt continues to be pumped indiscriminately for water. In 2003, amidst yet another water crisis, the Federation found itself tried and tired, a rather exhausted spectator to what in their eyes is a spurious operation and to others an essential service.

At the time of fieldwork, an attempt was being made to reinvigorate the Federation and address yet again not only the issues of unauthorised and excessive water pumping but also other development concerns. In recent years, land values along ECR have spiralled amidst a glitter of leisure and entertainment facilities (*Chapter Three*). Irrespective of whether they are approved or not, plots along ECR are in great demand. The Federation finds itself in a tricky situation in terms of allowing membership to unapproved developments. Admittance of new members is a burning issue, distracting their renewal efforts. Their reluctance is also due to the diversification of class groups along the ECR from the earlier mostly middle-class settlements, to a more heterogeneous composition, including the rich, upper classes, different rungs of the middle class, as well as the poor and marginalised groups. As a result of this heterogeneity, middle-class associations shun federations citing their unwillingness to form cross-class alliances.

5.3.2 Federations: cross-class alliance

Residents' associations have a tendency to thrive on the homogeneity of class interests making it virtually impossible for them to extend beyond their class groups. When discussing the success of their associations, residents often highlighted the need to be on the same wavelength. In an ironic fashion, while many residents in the new flat-complexes heralded the cosmopolitanism of the

new middle class, proudly claiming that there are people from all parts of the world residing in their complex, when it came to the question of expanding their associational activity, they still preferred to remain fenced in within their strongly defined property boundary.¹¹⁵

The reluctance to form an alliance with either the lower classes or the upper classes is a marked trait of these associations. For instance, the Kapaleeswarar Nagar residents' welfare association in the neighbourhood of Neelangarai along ECR has members only from the middle-class settlement excluding the elite residents of Casuarina Drive and the upper class inhabitants of Sunrise Avenue in the area (Figure 30). For the association officials, the problem is mainly from the 'other side':

See the main problem is they don't interact with people you know. They are all isolated, they barricade themselves. Now, here, when we have welfare association meeting, they don't come and attend the meetings or conduct their meetings here in our hall. They conduct the meetings in their own houses.....They don't interact because they are all busy people, they are all business people....they cannot come and interact with us. They have their own way. There is one guy to clean Casuarina Drive, one to clean Sunrise Avenue, like this it happens. (ECR-210304-01)

A different version emerges when a resident of Casuarina Drive was interviewed to clarify the allegation. He said that for a while the residents of Casuarina Drive were members of the Kapaleeswarar Nagar association but merely as observers with no voting powers. Finding the association to be involved in 'useless functions', he said that they eventually withdrew from the association (ECR-120904-01).

¹¹⁵ Their reaction is a reminder of some scholars' reservation about cosmopolitan citizenship as they fear that it is merely an articulation of 'an appropriate ideology for the "global village" of the new liberal managerial class' (Harvey 2000: 530).

Figure 30: Social fragmentation in Neelangarai, Chennai



Even as one resident commented proudly that the middle class are crucial to spreading a sense of equality, reducing disparity, and making the city more lively (AR-060304-01), many middle-class associations are wary of collaboration with other associations, even if they are from the middle class. While an association on paper and in its bye-laws recognises the need '[t]o associate and to co-operate with any external agency or similar associations in the neighbourhood to actively promote common interest and maintain a safe, clean, healthy and happy environment', the reality is different.¹¹⁶ Most of the associations insist that they are bogged down by internal problems relating to their daily needs, and haven't reached the stage *yet* of federating with other associations. They also reveal a rigid mental block against federations resulting from their petty fear of compromising whatever little advantage they may have

¹¹⁶ Based on material provided by ECR-250304-02

gained. There is little conviction that federations could actually strengthen their association. The ones who do express confidence in a federal approach are a limited minority, and are plagued by self-doubt about the feasibility of such an initiative.

Unable to look upwards (to the upper class) or sideways (to other middle-class groups), it is equally impossible for these residents' associations to look towards the poor and working class communities. If anything it is literally a downward condescending glance. There are numerous preconceived biases in the middle class minds about the poor that prevents the formation of a democratic partnership. This is a major hurdle in achieving a cross-class alliance for federations to operate successfully.

Engaging with the political society: patronage, not partnership

In many Indian cities, despite the insignificant physical distances that separate different social classes, social mechanisms have been devised to keep their interests spatially apart. Interactions between the classes are still structured hierarchically, and an inherent quality of the relationship between the middle class and the poor is one of patronage. In the early post-independence decades, the urban middle class provided social, cultural and moral leadership to the urban neighbourhoods with an associational life that was almost caste-like and revolved around a patron-client relationship (Chatterjee 2004). This notion of patronage continues to define efforts extended by middle-class residents' associations towards the lower-income groups living in their areas, with claims to public spiritedness underlined by tones of charitable benevolence. Common area billboards in the new flat-complexes are pinned with requests by conscientious residents requesting the fellow-residents to donate generously old clothes, and school text books to help the poor and the needy (Box 4).

Box 4: Billboard notice in a residential complex on ECR

To all residents:

It is time that we as a community try and do something for the needy and under privileged. With that in mind, we have come up with the following plan. At the end of every month, we plan to collect all old newspapers and magazines at the Children's room, located in B Block. We will then dispose the newspapers and magazines. The money collected from the disposal of the newspapers will be used for charity and we will keep you informed of the details. We also encourage residents to participate in these activities.

In Neelangarai, middle-class residents of Kapaleeswarar Nagar started a ladies club in the late-1980s to promote interaction amongst the residents. A few years later they started a Sowbhagya Educational Trust to help the poorer families from the adjoining village and the fishermen *kuppam*. While the membership of the ladies club is confined only to women from the middle and upper class households, the Trust is seen as a way of reaching out to the lower class settlements within the area. When queried as to whether the women from the *kuppam* or the village have membership to the ladies club, the president of the Trust who is also the founding member of the club insisted that the Trust was formed specifically to meet the needs of the *kuppam* and village communities and that membership to the ladies club doesn't extend to them:

You know this Sowbhagya Educational Trust is concentrating focussing only their problem. Membership is difficult. Those ladies [from the *kuppam*] don't come. How we are meeting with them is because of the Trust. Because most of the children, the Trust's children's mothers are like that, fishermen, construction workers, servant maids and like that.....once in three months we will keep a counselling, meet the parents.....we do that and help if they want any help with jobs like that, government loans, etc. (ECR-190304-03)

In response to why they are not allowed membership to the club, she explained that:

If you become a member of the association, they have to pay some money, payment is also there, they have to come well-dressed. If you come for a meeting and they have to talk they have to mingle with everybody and they are finding it very difficult to run their own bread and butter for their children and their own family....how can you expect them to be our members, ok..this economic difference you know makes a lot. (ECR-190304-03)

Though she was proud of the fact that the ladies club helped to include women from the upper class households in a situation where Kapaleeswarar Nagar residents' association had failed, it was clear that a separate organisation was required for engaging with the poorer communities, conceived on a charitable level, not one of partnership. It is evident that their sense of patronage towards the poor comes from the superiority of the middle class as employers. The slums continue to be viewed as a 'necessary evil or eye-sore' if the everyday needs of the middle-class households are serviced by the domestic maids, the drivers, the security guards, and the errand-boys who live in the squatter settlements right next to them. In such circumstances, Appadurai's (2002) mooted idea of a politics of partnership transposing across classes seems to be fabled and utopian, at least in the less formal set-up of residents' associations.

There is one instance where some semblance of a partnership seems to have been established. In the middle-class neighbourhood of KK Nagar near Arcot Road, a federation was recently launched. This started in January 2003 as an attempt to bring the existing sixty or so associations in the neighbourhood under one umbrella and display a sincere commitment to establishing a true partnership by engaging all classes in this initiative. Bordering along the middle-class colonies is a series of TNSCB slum resettlement colonies comprising of the poorer groups. Associations representing their interests have been invited to join the federation. The response has been cautious as every small association, especially the ones relating to the poor suspect a mismatch of interests and fear a dilution of their own agenda. At the time of fieldwork, only one of them had chosen to join the federation.

In the post-liberalisation years, with the state making a u-turn to indulge the civil societies and its middle-class members, the political society of the poor finds itself considerably weakened. While some settlements still feel that their basic-needs and welfare demands are best met via political society, there are others who are beginning to toy with the idea of aligning themselves with

civil society. As threats of political reprisal are not as effective as they used to be, they are left to adopt the 'middle-class politics of negotiation' rather than the 'lower class politics of confrontation'. The president of this *Nagar* that chose to join the federation explained that there was at one point a city-wide association for the TNSCB resettlement colonies, but their agendas became dominated by politics, rowdiness, and caste-based interests. He argued that political societies revolved around the charisma of leadership, wherein, the voices of the non-followers are stifled and as their particular settlement were disadvantaged by the lack of a strong caste identity, they didn't find it beneficial. He added, 'we don't want leadership, we want consensus.....we have realised that political participation is not effective in obtaining common services for the residents'. His remark on using political alignments for using favours was that 'this is not about freedom struggle but basic needs struggle':

We are attracted by the fact that their [middle class] associations are more democratic, more decent.....our *sangams* [associations] need to be cultivated like that in thought..... at the end of the day, political ideas come from the middle class. They are the ones who determine policies, politics and economics.....so we thought it will be better for us to federate with the middle class who are educated and can bridge the divide between the lower and upper classes'. (AR-070304-02)

Through the federation, they were attempting to chart a new politics of visibility in order to reverse their persistent condition of civic invisibility. But at the same time, they are aware that their interests are divided by one essential feature—the middle class don't want to lose what they have, while the poor are seeking what they don't have. He emphasised that for this effort to be successful, it has to be one of *kootuthanmai*, which roughly translates as cooperation or collaboration. He stressed that 'we don't want help from them, we are just interested in representing ourselves through a 'letter-pad association'.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ He was referring to the fact that middle class associations are registered, and write letters of protests and requests to the concerned authorities on 'proper' stationery with letterheads, which according to him could possibly gain better attention than handing petitions in a political rally or making oral requests to their slum-lord.

While it was too early to make a call on the success of this experiment, this concern over such collaborations slipping into patronage is well-founded, since patronage is often mistakenly celebrated as partnership. An article in *The Hindu* reported that in one area, '[c]utting across class barriers, the residents of Radhakrishnan Nagar [a middle-class colony] and Sivagamipuram [a slum] joined hands to improve their living conditions'. The article explained that a lack of civic consciousness amongst the slum dwellers resulted in street litter, open air defecation and clogged drains, resulting in a general stink in the area affecting the middle-class residents. The residents 'decided to step out of their mansions and draw up a plan to keep the neighbourhood clean. They took the first logical step...and then tried to rope in the slum people from the neighbouring Sivagamipuram', the article reported. The journalist added that

...cutting across class barriers, the residents of Radhakrishnan Nagar and Sivagamipuram came together to keep their area clean. While the moneyed class contribute a substantial sum towards the upkeep, the poor demonstrate their will by not littering the roads and discarding all the wastes in a bin constructed for the purpose. The results are palpable, as the environs have become cleaner.¹¹⁸

In making the above observation, he failed to question whether the middle class were simply buying civic adherence from the slum dwellers. Patronage is an old habit, but it is not the only dampener to the pursuit of partnership. In recent times, more than patronage, middle-class attitudes towards the poor have changed considerably from passive indifference associated with their patronage tendencies to one of active incrimination amidst an increasing portrayal of the poor as the undeserving class.

Engaging with the political society: illegitimacy and incrimination

Relationship between the middle class and the poor in urban India generally keeps shifting between benevolence/pity and castigation. But recently it seems to be based less on the former and more on the latter, with the middle class

¹¹⁸ Cleaning up together. (1997, 22 September). *The Hindu*, p. Metro Section - II.

viewing the poor in terms of illegitimacy and criminality. For instance, increasingly, instead of sympathising with the slums for their poor living conditions, slum-dwellers are ostracised as anti-social elements, involved in illegal and criminal activities. This attitude parallels a similar change in the position of the Indian judiciary where in contrast to the earlier position of the Supreme Court invoking Article 21 of the constitution upholding the right of every person to shelter and housing, by 2000, the court observed, "Rewarding an encroacher on public land with a free alternative site is like giving a reward to a pickpocket". This characterisation of the poor as drawn by the court, likening a slum dweller to a pickpocket was a definitive departure from the acknowledgement that the struggles of the poor to survive deserve respect and support (Kumar 2005). Even the press hasn't resisted participating in this onslaught. 'Encroachment of roads / illegal activities' read a headline in *The Hindu*, describing the pavement dwellers as not only a hindrance to the local residents, but also as indulging in anti-social activities and illegal trading.¹¹⁹

Middle-class residents voicing their concerns over the development of their neighbourhood exhibit a marked intolerance towards what they consider as the illegitimate presence of the lower classes. One resident exclaimed angrily:

Today there are associations for everything. It needs to be controlled and limited. Take for example, this hawkers' association, the association for platform businesses. It is a completely baseless association. It is illegal. It is them who have stolen the footpaths of T Nagar and Pondy Bazaar away from us. (ECR-020904-01)

Today, little sympathy is expressed for the pavement vendors. Pavement vendors are viewed loathsome by the residents who do everything possible to have them removed:

This whole area used to be like full of vendors we could never exit Harrington Road early because everybody would collect around the tea bunk and drink this tea. So now we have removed all of that, cleaned up.

¹¹⁹ Bhattacharya, S. (2003, 15 November). Encroachment of roads / illegal activities: Jamarah Thottam residents suffer in silence. *The Hindu*, p. 3.

Just started a green patch so like that you couldn't go across and stand there you know. (HRRA-210204-01)

The informality of the trade and habitation of the poor is equated simply with irregularity and illegitimacy. Presented as interlopers, 'people who have no business to be there' (SR-190304-01), middle-class residents associations end up if not with outright antagonism then a not-so-friendly relationship with the lower classes.

This is despite the fact that the middle-class residents clearly draw on the services of the poor for their daily domestic needs. In return, at one level, the poor employees often depend on their middle-class employers for petty loans. At another level, for major festivals, slum organisations solicit middle-class colonies for funds. While the middle-class individual is not so reluctant to extend a monetary favour to his domestic employee, in the case of the latter, when it comes to one association asking another for financial contribution, there is a clear expression of resentment and portrayal of such a demand as extortion (see Kaviraj 1997).

Not willing to have any kind of relationship with the poor, be it voluntary subscription or coerced extortion, many of the NMC developments choose to wall themselves in, more or less creating a 'fortified enclave' (Caldeira 1999). The poor are allowed entry to this citadel only as domestic employees, subject to strict control and surveillance.¹²⁰ But such efforts to internalise the environment is easier said than done. The landscape of most Third World cities is unmapped to such an extent that it allows the proliferation of multiple territorial claims, creating an ambiguous condition of 'volatile geography', and rendering the entire system of land ownership records and boundaries completely negotiable (Roy 2002). This became apparent when one

¹²⁰ These enclaves are not as ostentatious and fortified as the ones that Caldeira (1999) describes in Sao Paulo where they are caricatured with high walls and fences, armed guards, and technologies of surveillance. But her description of the upper class fear of contact with and contamination from the poor increasingly associating them with criminality while continuing to depend on them for domestic service is eerily true here.

residential complex tried to construct a boundary wall and demarcate itself clearly from the surrounding lower-class settlement. What should have been a simple exercise of erecting a wall turned into a tussle with the local people living around the development who contested the boundary line. As resentments grew, even before the wall could be completed, it was destroyed allegedly by 'these local people' (ECR-040904-01).

Given this unpleasant history, the residents' association of the complex decided not to have any relationship at an associational level with the local community. Elaborating on the 'bad blood', an association official said:

..even before any of us moved in, they had a big fight with the builder. These people did not allow the builder or the Corporation from sinking the pipes, that is, the sewage pipes. They did not allow that. Because their area is here. So far they have been enjoying this area and now we are here more people are going to commute. Generally, I mean the haves don't, I mean the have nots don't like the haves....they wanted some money for consecrating the temple, they want the money for putting () the land opposite, that is, the playground. They wanted to put wall around that. They wanted money from the builder. They have an association. They wanted money for their association. I don't know why somebody, I mean, my builder should give money to them. These are the things that they did. Here it is. Then hundred women gathered and made a, I mean, gheraoed the builder and then police came and so many people came and many things happened okay. (ECR-040904-01).

Portraying the issue as 'more of them coming to us, we don't go to them', he was convinced that the only way of preventing the situation from snowballing was by having no relationship at all. Interestingly, he mixed the issues of extortion and encroachment in the same breath. As a middle-class resident, he felt disturbed and violated equally by the monetary insistence on subscriptions and spatial insistence by contesting the physical boundaries of their locality. But instead of his desire of having 'nothing to do with these locals', the situation has tipped the other way where a mutual atmosphere of antipathy and hostility pervades.

Many residents in this complex acknowledge that the local community has been living there for a long time, before the arrival of the middle class, and

could obviously feel encroached upon as well, but instead of seeking a dialogue, they were convinced that non-interference was the best option. The middle-class colony of Kapaleeswarar Nagar in Neelangarai took a similar position towards the nearby fishermen *kuppam*:

.....if you don't interfere with them [the fishermen *kuppam*] there is no problem at all. They have been here for hundreds of years, thousands of years. They are there. They have settled there long back and we don't want to be seen as encroachment.We don't mind and we don't interfere. (ECR-210304-01)

Having said that, a penumbra of illegality and criminality casts a long shadow over their interactions with the poor, if it takes place at all. This Kapaleeswarar Nagar resident gave the particular example of one *kuppam* resident (a non-fisherman) who conducted martial arts classes, in what he deemed were 'encroached' spaces, first on the beach, and later in a temporary shed erected in one of the *Nagar*'s undeveloped plots. When the association along with the owner of the plot complained and tried to evict him, he gathered a few fishermen to stop the eviction. Afraid of going to the police, the plot owner engaged a goon from another neighbourhood to evict him. But the resident narrating this incident insisted that 'they [the fishermen] wouldn't have come on their own, they came because [the encroacher] summoned them to come. Otherwise they wouldn't have come' (ECR-210304-01). It was clear in his mind that the fishermen were acting as mercenaries in the hands of the encroacher.

A similar incident happened in Valmiki Nagar where a conflict over the use of the adjoining road emerged between a TNHB residential colony and a private club, both on the seaside (Figure 31). The residents' association, convinced that the road belonged to their development, had it barricaded to prevent the club customers from using it. After several efforts to remove the barricade had failed:

...the club people what they did was they brought people from the *kuppam*, incited them and overnight eighty to hundred people came, broke down the barricade, made it nothing and went away. After that they [the club owners] called us for talks. We went and said first replace the barricade then we can have talks. They thought the *kuppam* will be a

problem for us. We said clearly there is no problem between the *kuppam* and us. Tomorrow if we tell them, they will do similar thing to you. They are only an instrument. (ECR-150304-02)

Figure 31: Conflict in Valmiki Nagar between 'civil' and 'political' society



In the minds of the middle-class residents, this is another reason why they don't subscribe to the idea of partnering with the lower classes, as they perceive the poorer communities like the fishermen as mere 'muscle power', with no agenda of their own. From the above narrated incidents, it is clear that the middle-class associations believed that the fishermen's support could be purchased if needed, and hence didn't need a formal partnership. But these associations have a dismissive attitude not just towards the poor, but also towards more institutionalised efforts taken by NGOs, even when it involved activities specific to their neighbourhood concerns.

5.3.3 Engaging with civil society 'proper'

In the minds of many residents, their associations are frail structures, and to extend their operations beyond their own property boundaries is a Herculean

task. Identifying the need for a strong gelling agent to hold their efforts together, many residents identified NGOs and 'proper' civil society organisations as the necessary apparatus to take the lead and raise the stakes to a different level. But there is confusion over how they conceive and imagine NGOs and civil society organisations. Some of them continue to view them as merely charitable organisations with a clientalist agenda while others are beginning to grasp its role in terms of people empowerment and grass-roots mobilisation.

Residents identify the crucial role of NGOs and 'proper' civil society organisations based on various criteria: that their associations are inadequate to tackle the challenges because of practical and logical feasibility issues, and that there are proper, professional institutions to undertake these larger tasks. But by thus arguing, are they absolving themselves of a larger responsibility? Surprisingly, NGOs that work closely with the residents' associations acknowledge that residents' associations are not capable of tackling larger city level issues. Thus, an official of Exnora, a high-profile NGO working closely with residents' associations in managing the urban environment argued that:

...all this social scientists and NGOs and everyone getting into this act is giving a far too technical definition to residents welfare associations. Residents welfare associations started off basically in areas where there was a need for improving infrastructure.....this was more a grouping of people for getting some basic infrastructure. Now if you expect that this group is going to be perpetual and that they are going to be regularly participating in things like waste management and all that, it is going to be difficult. So you need this civil society institutions to initially set-up things, run it for a while but ultimately there has got to be a more perfect group. It could be a professional NGO. When I say a professional NGO I am talking about those who are not for profit but run on very professional lines and things like that. Ultimately they are the ones who run it on a long term basis. (MBN-310804-01)¹²¹

¹²¹ Exnora was started in 1989 by MB Nirmal to promote self-help concept among citizens in areas of environmental management, with specific focus on municipal solid waste management. The parent organisation is Exnora International under which there are various affiliate wings – national exnoras, state exnoras, district exnoras, forum of civic exnoras and finally the smallest unit of civic exnoras, functioning at the street or colony level, in addition to other initiatives such as the Naturalists' Club, Women's Guild, Farmers' Exnora and Friends of the Beach Exnora. But it is the civic exnora which has captured the attention of residents' associations who use its platform to negotiate with the state authorities for the procurement of better amenities.

At the same time, this NGO representative admits that contemporary lifestyle choices are not creating a condition where the residents' association can intersect and interact with NGOs or any formal civil institutions. He cites different reasons, including the 'peculiarities of vocation' which keeps the employees for longer hours at their office desks. More importantly, he identifies the culprit in the new homeownership trend as it has transformed the way people are serviced. As the Corporation outsources civic tasks like garbage collection and disposal to the private sector, NGOs like Exnora feel that privatisation is an indulgent way of servicing the residents, drastically reducing their civic engagement and sense of voluntarism. Specifically remarking on the multinational company (Onyx) that was hired for garbage collection and disposal, he says:

...this company was hired for a very smallest thing like taking the garbage to Pallikaranai [the landfill site] and setting fire to it. You can ask me how Onyx has affected. We had about 700 Civic Exnora branches where people were under a kind of pressure to do source separation with no option having been left to deal with the garbage. What they found with the Onyx coming and doing this work so efficiently, they lost the initiative for source separation with no compulsion anymore for them to do them. They say now Onyx is doing it so why should we do it....Originally it was public, Corporation was doing that, then it became volunteerism, Exnora was doing it, so if you compare before, public and volunteerism, public means Corporation, then volunteerism was something great because people had ownership towards their job and ownership towards achievement. Now volunteerism has been replaced by something, I would say, a blunder, in that sense, by commercialism. So you have to pay through your nose that too foreign exchange to foreign company.....people's participation has been wiped out by our, what you call, privatisation. (MBN-310804-01)

If people are willing to 'pay through their nose', as he says, to get privatised services rather than go through the whole drudgery of voluntary collective action, it is also because garbage collection companies like Onyx represent a status marker where neighbourhoods that are served by them consider themselves privileged (*Chapter Four*), and others which aren't try to procure them in informal and unofficial ways.

This sense of paying for services comes from an enhanced revelation of the residents as consumers in the neo-liberal climate. When nearly 400 families reside together in a complex-style development, they view the benefits of collective bargaining from a consumerist mode. Their material interests have expanded not only in terms of consumer durables but also in perceiving public goods such as water, electricity, gas, telephones as the same, that is, pay and procure, if possible from the public sector, and if not, from the private suppliers. Thus, in many flat complexes, developers promise twenty-four hour uninterrupted electricity with generator back-up in a context where electricity supply is erratic and subject to illegal grid-tapping. An NGO official reflecting on this explained that for a long time there was a legal issue attached to consumption where consumers were considered as only those who pay for services. Thus,

a whole range of everyday problems are associated with things that you necessarily don't pay for and certainly not directly, maintaining roads, civic issues, street lighting and paving and all of that, any civic, standard civic issues, planning issues, all of this, you cannot say that you are paying the CMDA for something, you are paying the corporation for something. (CAG-030904-01)

Today, the situation has changed with increasing commodification of housing and the facilities that come with it:

So you find tailor-made schemes which make it more attractive [...] to buy a house the kind of features, things that are put in place are all; don't necessarily fit in with our scheme of things. 24-hour electricity supply for example I think works against; for example electricity. I will give you the example and I will tell you why this doesn't necessarily work in the interest of the rest of the society. When you have an apartment block that is being built say 250-260 apartments and part of the features the apartment provides is 24-hour electricity back-up, what you are doing is giving up your rights as being 270 consumers together to ensure reliable electricity from the department. Because what you are doing is you are investing in an alternative system which is sort of factored in your own cost whereas if you were to put that money into a sort of a community struggle to get better electricity then everyone would benefit from this. But instead what happens is some of these guys are even willing to get off the chain, get off the grid.....they are willing to run hours and hours on it, spending whatever money it takes, but they don't realise that every time they do this, it is a further disincentive for the system to improve, for the overall system to improve.....as citizens you don't realise that there is an electricity problem in the state or in the city you live in because you never faced the electricity problem so then you believe the system is

excellent and electricity is supplied all the time and constant and all of that. (CAG-030904-01)

There is a fundamental change in the perception and position of the new middle-class residents. If they are faced with a crisis, say of water, they rally together not to petition officials or public authorities but to raise resources, to investigate opportunities of private supply, such as purchasing water from private tankers and lorries, or having expensive treatment plants installed. This affects to a large extent not only the way residents' associations view their collectivity but also the possibility of their collaboration with 'proper' civil society organisations. To explain this phenomenon better the following section analyses the efforts of an initiative in Valmiki Nagar called *Puduvellam*, a 'proper' NGO formed by a local resident with aspirations of collaborating with the residents' associations in the area to tackle concerns of water and other environmental issues.¹²²

Mobilising for water

Despite the prominent presence of three major waterways criss-crossing the geography of the city, namely the Cooum and Adyar River and the Buckingham Canal, Chennai has for a long time been a water-starved city relying on rain-fed reservoirs and ground-water for its supply. Irrigation tanks were a prominent source of water harvesting for much of South India where the rivers are non-perennial. Different types of tanks were used to tap rain water including percolation ponds, natural lakes, artificial reservoirs and temple tanks. Of these, temple tanks proved to be quite crucial as the religious faith of the people could be harnessed successfully to protect the environment and natural resources. Chennai city had at one point 39 temple tanks in addition to the several *yeris* or artificial tanks to tap and harvest the rain water.¹²³ Though the exact number of temple tanks that remain in the city today is not clear, most of them are dry, the result of poor maintenance and recharge. One such tank is

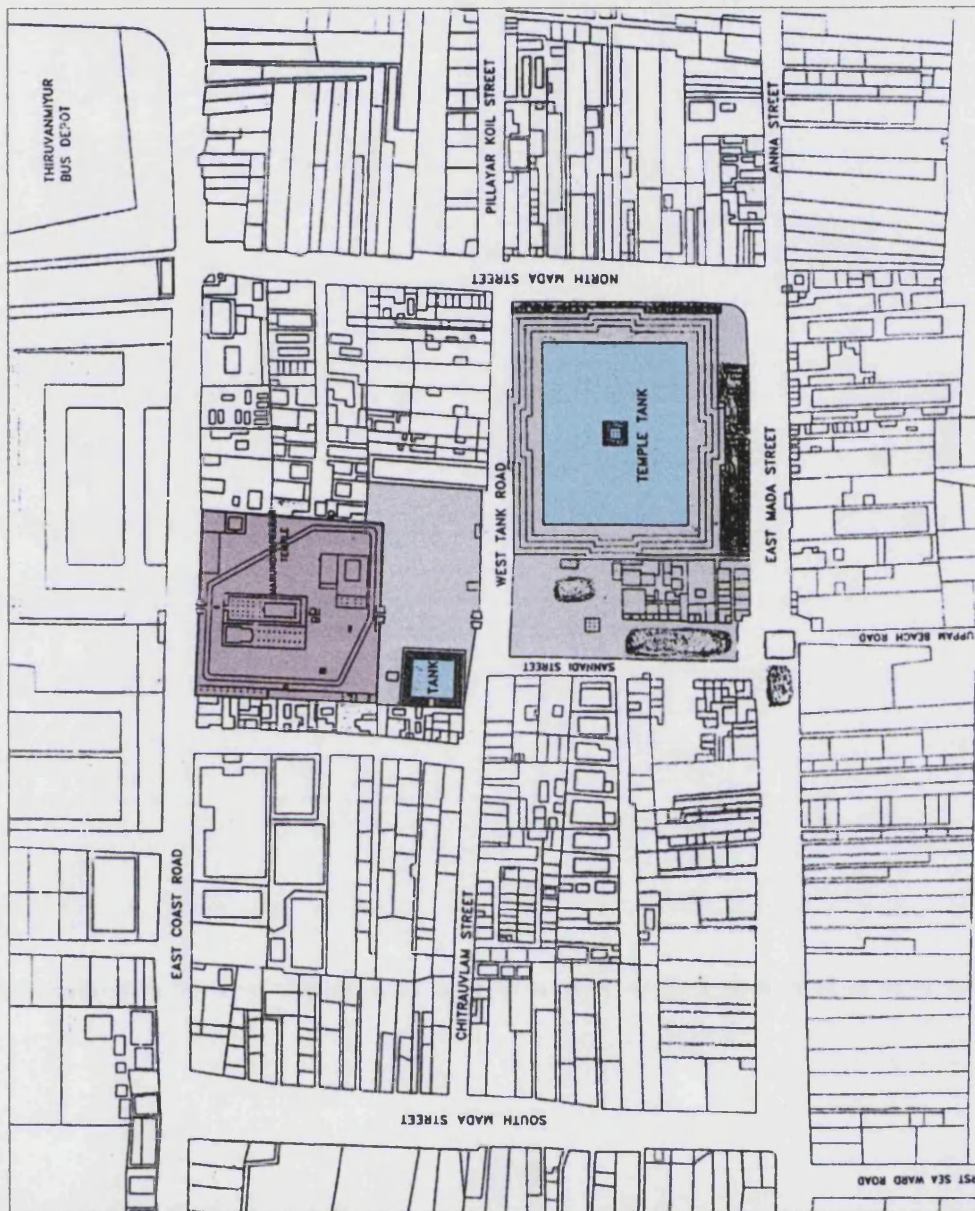
¹²² *Puduvellam* means 'new water' in Tamil

¹²³ *Sacred tanks of South India*. (2002). Chennai: CPR Environmental Education Centre.

attached to the Marundeeswarar temple in Thiruvannamiyur and the activities of *Puduvellam* were dedicated to its rejuvenation.

The neighbourhood of Thiruvannamiyur was originally a village on its own with a well-recorded ancient history dating back to the early Pallava period of the Sangam age (first and fifth century AD). The history of the temple is steeped in legendary narratives. Its five main water bodies (two wells inside the temple complex, two tanks – one, axially fronting the temple, and a large lake nearby) were celebrated for their sacredness and holy redeeming qualities. Today, the imposing presence of the temple complex on the surrounding geography is greatly diminished, overwhelmed by urbanisation and encroachments. The two tanks are empty and the lake has long since disappeared, making way for concretised urban growth (Figure 32).

Figure 32: Marundeeswarar Temple, Thiruvannamiyur, Chennai



Source: INTACH, Chennai

In 1993, an attempt to revitalise the temple area was made when the residents' associations in the vicinity (including the predominant one of Valmiki Nagar) joined with the Rotary Club of Madras to desilt the tank and conserve rain water. The scheme, the 'Thaneer' Project, seemed a success when 7 feet of

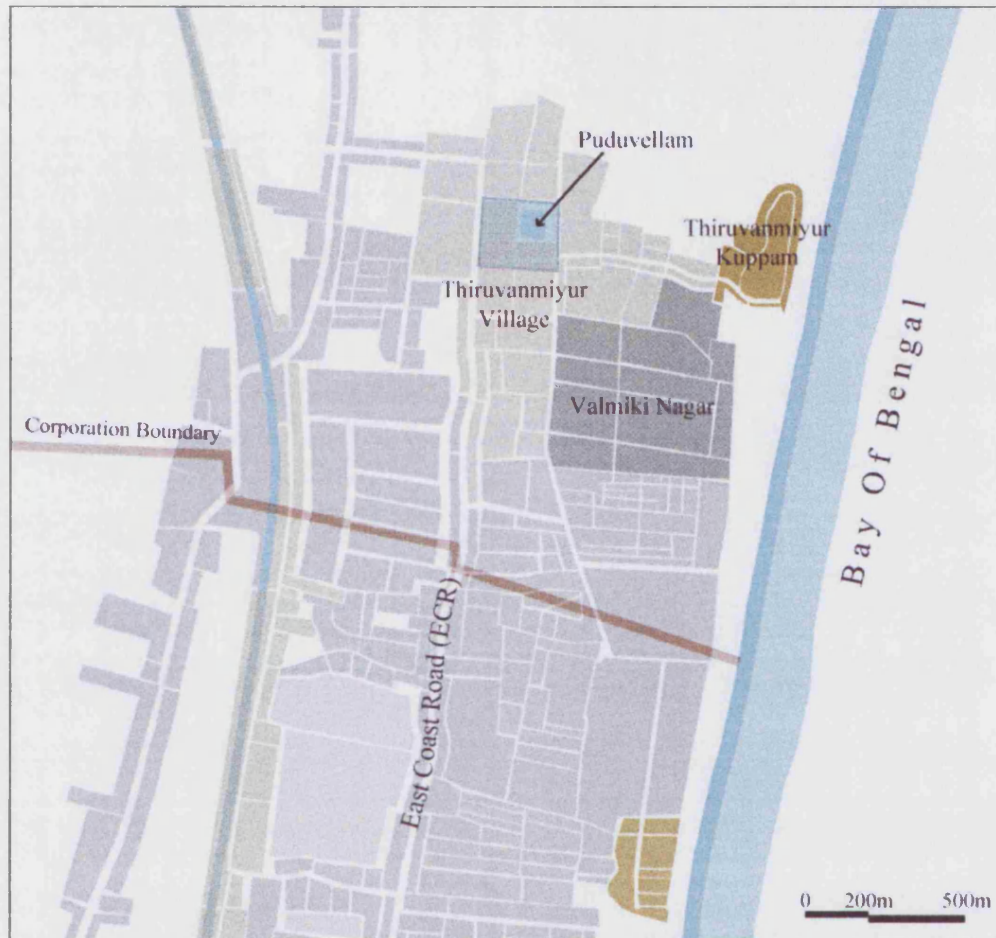
water was reported in the tank after a good monsoon.¹²⁴ But within a few years, the tank dried up, falling once again into disrepair. Various reasons were cited for this failure, one being that the primary responsibility rested with the Valmiki Nagar Residents Welfare Association, which by the late-1990s had become a dormant body, and thus was unable to maintain the tank. Another alleged reason is that in the process of desilting the tank the workers, appointed by the Rotary Club, punctured the clay bed crucial for retaining the rain water, resulting in the rain water seeping through the sandy layer.

A decade later in 2003, a new committee was formed to undertake one again efforts to revitalise the tank and its vicinity. This time the project was at a larger scale involving the State authorities from the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Department, the Chennai Corporation, Chennai Water Supply and Sewage Board (Metrowater), the Highways Department, and Archaeological Survey of India, working in close collaboration with the local communities represented by *Puduvellam* through the coordinating presence of the Tamil Nadu Chapter of the national NGO, the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage/INTACH (Figure 33).¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Bharathi, R. (1994, 9-15 January). Cleaned Marudeeswarar Temple Tank handed over. *Adayar Times*, p. 8. 'Thaneer' means water in Tamil.

¹²⁵ INTACH was founded in 1984 as a membership-based organisation serving as a catalyst for heritage awareness and conservation in India.

Figure 33: Pudukkottai, Marundeeswarar Temple, Thiruvannamiyur, Chennai

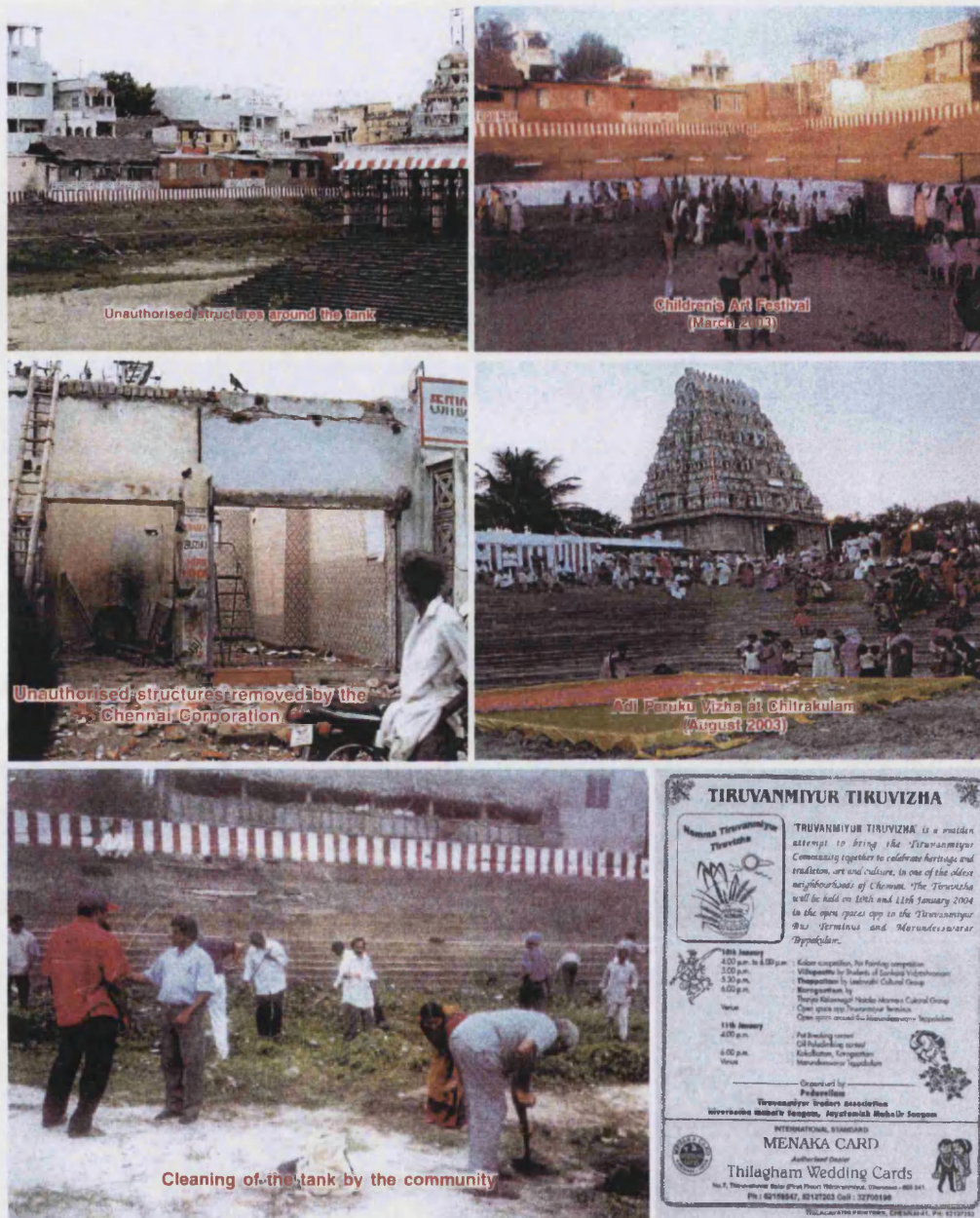


The restoration of the tank paralleled an authoritative, almost dictatorial exercise undertaken by the State Government to make rainwater harvesting mandatory in all buildings. While much fanfare has been made about the success of this initiative, in the case of Thiruvannamiyur, the tank project involved more than rainwater harvesting. The exercise presented an opportunity to rid the tank vicinity of encroachments, besides the said objective of retaining water in the tank. Those involved emphasised the need to keep the tank clean of garbage and prevent people from using it as an open toilet. Neighbourhood residents were asked to participate as volunteers, serving as a crucial maintenance and surveillance crew. *Pudukkottai*'s role was mainly to canvas for their support and the enlisting of volunteers.

In this regard, *Puduvellam* was responsible for disseminating information on the project, and raising partial funds for the renovation (it has offered to contribute 25 per cent of the estimated cost of the project, with the remaining 75 per cent coming from the Chennai Corporation). To this end, it first conducted a Children's Art Festival focussing on the theme of conservation and water, held within the large tank in March 2003, and later *Adi Perukku*, a Hindu ritual was held in the smaller tank in August 2003. Greeting cards made from the Children's Art Festival were sold to raise money. Finally on 10 and 11 January 2004, a neighbourhood festival called as the Thiruvannamiyur Thiruvizha was held around the temple tank area with music, dance and competitions for women, youth and children.¹²⁶ Unfortunately for *Puduvellam*, these events failed to highlight the woods for the trees as its core objective was lost on the middle-class residents. Residents attended enthusiastically the festivities, but failed to commit as volunteers of the project for several reasons (Figure 34).

¹²⁶ In another neighbourhood in the city, centred again around a historic temple and its tanks—Mylapore—the residents of the area also launched an environment-based development initiative called 'Namma Mylapore' again in collaboration with INTACH to revitalise this historic part of the city. A Mylapore festival is successfully held annually, organised by the local neighbourhood newspaper, *Mylapore Times*, with much publicity, thanks to some generous amount of corporate sponsorship.

Figure 34: Activities of Pudevellam



Source: Pudevellam (ECR-300304-03)

Many claimed that they did not have first-hand information about the initiative. They insisted that their participation was not solicited directly by personal door-to-door requests, and they got to know about the initiative only through reports in the local neighbourhood newspaper. *Pudevellam* had advertised in the neighbourhood weekly *Adayar Times*, calling for volunteers to help clean

the tank, with details about the organisation as well as special event days including festivals and cleaning-up days. Much of the information was lost on an average reader, whose eyes train on selected items such as festival announcements. They view them as an innovative alternative to leisure and entertainment, but choose to ignore the volunteering request. A long-time resident of Valmiki Nagar, an ex-government official, who has been involved in the residents' association and other neighbourhood level initiatives, when asked about *Puduvellam* said:

But I must say they are doing good work I am sure they are but they have not done they have not exerted themselves to reach out to the people here. That's the impression I have got. Nobody has come and seen me. I am not complaining. I could not expect anyone to come and see me but the fact is they have not gone about doing that. Occasionally we get a pamphlet or something like that but that is good work. Fault lies on both sides. I have a feeling that they are well-meaning people, I am sure there are a number of reasons in starting this work which is excellent work but the impression I have and I may be wrong here is that they did not indulge in much of an attempt to get everybody together and of course even if they had everybody would not even have come in but a larger number might have come in, and quite frankly *people here are not all that interested either*. (ECR-150304-01, emphasis added)

Puduvellam officials refute the claim that proper dissemination was not done, insisting that personal door-to-door campaigning was undertaken with pamphlets distributed to every household outlining a simple request '*Puduvellam* invites you all for a meeting to discuss the role of civil society in the protection and conservation of the Marundeeswarar Temple Tank'. But few Valmiki Nagar residents attended the meeting. This is mainly because Valmiki Nagar residents, as illustrated by the comments of this resident above, view *Puduvellam* as something outside of the Valmiki Nagar community, associating it with Thiruvannamiyur and its village. In referring to *Puduvellam* he says 'they are well-meaning people', and by terming himself and his colony as 'people here', he clearly applies a process of othering which makes this need to

find common cause as a community difficult, despite the fact that *Puduvellam* is an initiative started by a resident of Valmiki Nagar.¹²⁷

Residents also view *Puduvellam* as a charitable institution to which they can at best make monetary contributions but not commit to personal participation. There are others who have focussed more on its accessory activities such as clearing up the encroachments and resolving some of the traffic issues in the area while failing to notice the primary objective of water management. As a *Puduvellam* official pointed out, 'when we organise a talk on water, people don't turn up. But later they say, we heard about it, we want to know about it' (ECR-010404-02). Few of them have actually taken up the brooms and spade on Saturday and Sunday mornings to be physically present at the tank for cleaning exercises. Those who have engaged with this effort through direct participation see it as a fantastic objective but one that has to struggle against the wave of rigid Hindu traditions that prohibit such community-based actions or initiatives.

If the residents of Valmiki Nagar do not want to get their hands dirty, it is because there are fundamental socio-religious strictures attached to this reluctance. The prevalent caste hierarchy creates a social stigma attached to garbage and its collection, where 'Corporation workers who collect garbage, rag-pickers and scavengers are often dalits from the bottom of society with very few opportunities to mount the social ladder' (Tropp 1998: 160). Besides the children from the nearby schools who have signed on to the campaign, it is mostly the poor and lower class people from the village who turn up in large numbers for the cleaning exercises. This is something that the founder of *Puduvellam*, himself a resident of Valmiki Nagar, acknowledges (ECR-300304-03).

¹²⁷ This tendency of the middle class to rely on the process of othering to acquit themselves of social culpability will become clearer as we examine their engagement with public space concerns in the next chapter.

Indian scholars have speculated on the reluctance of most Indians to participate personally in efforts involving public cleaning. Both Kaviraj (1997) and Chakrabarty (1992) draw on the distinction between the inside (home) and the outside to reveal the anxieties of upper class/caste people who are accustomed to living in caste societies. In a very distinctive construction of communal space by the caste system, the middle class venture in the outside oblivious of the filth and convinced that this is a space for which they have no responsibility.¹²⁸

This interpretation explains the indifference of most upper caste/middle-class Valmiki Nagar residents to cleaning the tank. For, bound by their class/caste privileges, they seek solutions to the water crisis in a manner completely different from that of *Puduvellam* which is a long-term, grass-roots strategy. While residents acknowledged the need for a comprehensive environmental strategy to manage the water crisis, this was only at an abstract level. Their preference is to purchase water from private suppliers or even installing treatment plants for gray water recycling which, according to one resident, addresses better the 'problem at hand' (ECR-170304-01).

If they have failed to find common cause here, it is also because the middle-class residents are convinced that such self-help programmes and grassroots initiatives are meant for the poor who are the 'have-nots', and that the 'haves' do not need bottom-up engagement. The agenda of *Puduvellam*, in their viewpoint, is more beneficial to the poorer community in the village as they are unable to afford water through private means and their role in the initiative is not as partners but as (financial) patrons. In a cause that is clearly underlined by class overtones, middle-class residents do not see any convergence with their own concerns. They see the tank improvement for its immediate benefits as a beautification project. When INTACH made a short film on the temple tank recording the memories of long-time Valmiki Nagar

¹²⁸ This comes through in their use of public spaces which will be addressed in the next chapter.

residents, their recollections were mostly aesthetic, about how they could see fish in the tank, and the area around it being clean and without encroachments. Not many made the link between refilling the tank and recharging the ground water aquifer.

Thus, in spite of the fact that *Puduvellam* was initiated by a resident of Valmiki Nagar to ensure a grassroots presence of residential communities in a project located within their neighbourhood and involving the participation of prominent State authorities and NGOs, residents have turned the project outwards, locating it beyond their own area of concern, and placing their interests as outsiders looking in. The analysis of this particular initiative reveals the failure of middle-class resident groups to engage with 'proper' civil society organisations, mainly because of their undermining of grass-roots efforts as something for the poor and not for the middle class. They instead rely on private modes to secure not just commodities and consumer durables but also key infrastructure services, which are generally considered to be goods of public consumption. This tendency brings us to the third and final section of this empirical analysis which is the ability and the willingness of resident groups to engage with the state and public authorities.

5.4 Engaging with the state

To say that the state is in metamorphosis since and as a result of neo-liberalisation is probably stating the obvious. This process is a universal tale of political transformation wherein the state adjusts its role to align better with the interests of private capital. But the intention here is not to dwell on the interface between the state and private forms of capital, but to reflect more on the engagement of the citizens with the state in a condition where it is not just the state but its subjects as well who are seeking benefits from privatisation. There is a nagging suspicion that in the light of the middle-class reliance on private suppliers, their withdrawal from state dependency would be as much as the state's own withdrawal from the provision of a variety of services. But this is confounded by another premise that whatever state presence is left is

increasingly of a bourgeois nature wherein state actions tend to resonate with the bourgeois aspirations of the middle class (Baviskar 2003; Fernandes 2004). It seems as if an active interface between the state and its middle-class citizens could persist in light of this alleged convergence, all the more so with recent state vows to deliver the city back to its 'proper citizens' (Chatterjee 2004).

Yet, traditionally the middle class have generally been marked by political apathy and disdain for politicians (*Chapter Two*). The Exnora official described politicians as 'one dirt we cannot remove....It is something non-recyclable waste these people are' (MBN-310804-01). While as 'proper citizens' the middle class endorse recent state actions involving city beautification schemes, they are still cautious about playing into the hands of the state. Wary of becoming a pawn in machine politics, they resist their portrayal as a massive vote-bloc. While residents are aware of the advantages of collective bargaining gained through their associations, they also foresee other risks in this kind of exposure. Consider the comments of the following resident on her association and the way it can be (mis)used:

Because we are in a huge volume, we are about 1000 or so residents in 200 flats here we easily get things done through our own initiatives. Outsiders say Premiers [name of the flat complex] get their things done. But we restrict entry of politicians during elections. We don't want to be treated as a collective vote-bank. (AR-130304-01)

She was clear that while the collective existence of her residential complex with a large number of families ensured recognition amongst the Corporation officials, it shouldn't become a collectivity that is harnessed for political gains. Similarly, when a prominent federation organised their annual general meeting at the peak of election campaigning in 2004, political parties tried to turn this event into a platform for vote canvassing. A candidate from the main opposition party secured permission from the association officials to speak at their meeting. But it made many of the middle-class attendees nervous and they resented the hijacking of their meeting agenda on neighbourhood development and welfare issues, into an open political rally outlining the merits and achievements of the concerned party and its candidate. One of them stressed at

the meeting that just because they have got together as a group did not mean that 'we are becoming political' (AR-070304-01). When a week later another political party requested permission to canvas at a similarly organised event, the association politely refused.

Burning your fingers with politics

During the 1996 local elections (initiating the process of local governance after two decades), many residents' associations were so enthusiastic about this opportunity that some even decided to contest the elections. This event was seen as an opportunity to step up from mere expressions of their grievances, and take a direct role in addressing problems. Reporting this trend, *The Hindu* exclaimed:

Move over bureaucrats and politicians! Citizens now want to take part directly in civic management. Determined to get involved in decision-making for civic improvements, residents of at least three middle-class colonies in the suburban Chitlapakkam have fielded their own candidates for the local body elections. The aspirants are representatives from the residents' civic welfare associations.¹²⁹

Hardly had this effort germinated into a realisable form when it quickly dried up into disappointment. Six months later, most of the elected independent candidates found themselves battling bureaucracy and bankruptcy in their vain attempts to get things done. In April 1997, *The Hindu* again noted that the voters 'who thought that the independents they elected.....would solve their civic problems appear a disappointed lot today'.¹³⁰ What could have been an innovative experiment died a quick death, and wasn't repeated in the 2001 local elections.

The spirit of this effort was also dampened by the abundant mass of scepticism surrounding it. NGOs like Exnora, which work closely with the residents' associations, chose not to participate in the 1996 local body

¹²⁹ Ramachandran, K. (1996, 12 October). Residents' candidates in the field. *The Hindu*, p. 3.

¹³⁰ Shanker, S. (1997, 28 April). Model of inaction. *The Hindu*, p. Metro I.

elections, wary as they were of lending a political colour to their organisation. The President of Exnora wryly commented in a local newspaper interview that '[p]eople still consider politics to be a dirty business', and when queried about the possibility of Exnora having a bigger role within the Corporation, he said that they were not ready for that role.¹³¹ In fact, a decade later, their stance has taken a turn aggressively against the Corporation and its councillors accusing them of being threatened by volunteerism and nullifying people's initiatives (MBN-310804-01).

Given the context of this rather poor opinion that an important NGO like Exnora holds of the recent political changes in the city, the creation of fertile conditions wherein residents associations could engage openly and productively with the state and public authority seems limited. While there are examples of governments in various Indian cities reaching out to middle-class residents' associations through formal mechanisms of collaborative partnerships (such as the Bhagidari scheme in Delhi), in Chennai, there is more reticence amongst the middle class towards a direct form of partnership with the state, as seen in the reactions of the residents towards the state-promoted *Citizen for Safe Roads* initiative openly seeking middle-class support and participation.¹³²

Citizen for Safe Roads

Chapter Four highlighted traffic as one of the primary infrastructure issues where the bourgeois nature of the urban development agenda is visible. With traffic improvement schemes geared towards the middle and upper classes, it is reasonable to expect that the state would try and enlist them as their political partners in such attempts. It was thus that in 2002 the City Traffic Police

¹³¹ Exnora President says it will keep out of Corp'n. elections for present. (1996, 22-28 September). *Adayar Times*, p. 1.

¹³² Bhagidari: The citizen – government partnership was initiated in 2000 by the Delhi government, engaging the participation of resident welfare associations, market and trader associations and NGOs in everyday governance of the city. Limited to middle class colonies, the scheme now boasts of 1100 bhagidars (partners). For an analysis of the scheme see Chakrabarti (2008); Gaurav and Singhal (2008); Uppal and Ghosh (2006).

launched the *Citizen for Safe Roads (CSR)* scheme, where citizens would partner traffic police in the city's traffic management.

Encouraged initially by the enrolment of more than 2000 volunteers, the traffic police formed an executive committee called the Chennai Traffic Task Force (CTTF). One action of the CTTF was the 'meet the people' programme, where a meeting was convened with the residents' associations. More than 150 representatives attended the first meeting. Sensing the potential for the residents' associations to play a major role, a model partnership case study was undertaken with a residents' association in the city – Harrington Road Residents' Association (HRRA). The Joint Commissioner of Police (Traffic) GUG Sastry explained that in this case:

We sat down with the association people and mutually we discussed and prepared a traffic improvement action plan for the whole area including where the parking areas, no parking areas should go, what are the facilities they want and other things. And the association also came up in a big way sponsoring the signage on the road. We implemented the plan. It is one of the successful things, you know, what do you call a model. You would say. And not only that it has a good representation of the CSR who regularly come to that junction and regulate traffic. It is a good example of a successful partnership. (GUGS-100904-02)

This model example was proclaimed a success, with the press reporting a smooth flow of traffic, separate parking slots and neat pavements in the area, all due to the combined efforts of the residents' association, the traffic police and the Corporation.¹³³ The next obvious step would have been to replicate it elsewhere in the city with other residents' associations. But the scheme didn't kick off as it had done with HRRA. The Commissioner admitted that:

We requested other associations to take up that initiative, but I am afraid the response wasn't that encouraging. In fact, we had to go twice and our own officers went twice and tried to discuss and tried to prepare some kind of action plan. So what we what I imagined was really that it would take-off and that each association would have its own little small little traffic improvement managers that can be integrated and we can have lot of things done in different areas. But it really has not come up that way. (GUGS-100904-02)

¹³³ Harrington Road receives a face-lift. (2004, 12 May). *New Indian Express*, p. 3; Fostering civic pride. (2003, 24 July). *The Hindu*, p. Metro Plus 3.

Yet, he placed a large part of his faith on residents' associations as an essential component to the delivery of his citizen-led scheme. Insisting that they should be encouraged, he allowed them some respite under the argument that:

..many of the residents associations are so preoccupied with the water problem that they are not even able to focus on other things....many of these areas have the problems of water and sewage. These two things have not been tackled properly. So they are more bothered about that and then naturally traffic is something that is taken for granted, that it is going to be bad....they have to take an integrated view of the whole thing, you know, your objective in getting in the residents' associations not only in traffic point of view that they should take care of their own area, in terms of crime prevention, traffic improvement and little environmental perspectives, in terms of garbage disposal, keeping things clean. That is a difficult task. We have been approaching them, we keep doing that. We keep knocking the doors of these people. Sometimes or the other it will be done. (GUGS-100904-02)

The extent of naivety in this statement from a high-profile official is perhaps surprising. While water remains the primary occupation of the residents of the city, it is not that they do not ponder over issues like traffic (Figure 35). Letters to the editor section in the daily and weekly newspapers lament traffic and transportation issues including the location of bus-stops, erratic and non-existent bus services, identification of dangerous traffic conditions, requesting the need for a traffic light, pedestrian crossing, and a general improvement in the management of traffic. And during field interviews, several residents identified traffic issues (and parking) as a concern.

Figure 35: RK Laxman, *The Times of India* on poor road conditions



Not that, my dear man. This one. We haven't got orders to repair that.

Source: Laxman (2004: 138; 37)



Yes, the other road is shorter to the office but it is impossible to drive on it. It is badly maintained and neglected.

However, in the case of HRRA, traffic was *the most* pressing issue. The president of HRRA in the opening line of the interview said: 'We have seven schools in one Km radius, so traffic was a nightmare' (HRRA-210204-01). Even for HRRA partnering with the traffic police to find a solution was not their first option. As she explained, for a while they called the Corporation and the city officials to complain about problems, expecting a rectification. It was only later that they considered CSR's voluntary programme and decided on the recourse to partnership. Another reason is that one of the traffic wardens appointed by the city police to popularise the CTTF initiative is a member of HRRA, and he played a major role in facilitating its enrolment as the model volunteer.

Not all associations admit this as a possibility. As the Commissioner himself said '[t]he moment we go and tell them, okay, let's join hands to improve traffic in this area the first thing they ask is to post two constables here, post an officer here'. Many times, when the city officials, such as the

police, organise 'meet the public' forums, the residents turn up with a laundry list of grievances. Their perception of these events is that they are some kind of a petition durbar where they can air their complaints. In August 2003, the first citywide public interaction organised by the City Traffic Police to promote CSR generated 768 written petitions and numerous oral complaints on how to improve the traffic scenario, civic conditions and basic amenities. But when the time came for the residents to apply the collectivity of their associations in formulating a traffic management plan for their areas, they were missing. Residents though argue against the improbability of their involvement:

..as an association we can only give suggestions. We cannot physically make the changes. Also, addressing traffic problems involves dealing with a lot of vested interests. So many hardware shops are here on the main road with lorries carrying overloaded things. They use our roads as bypass road. We cannot manage their movement. It is the police that should do it. (ECR-250304-03)

When the above resident expressed his fear of 'vested interests', he was referring to commercial vehicles such as private van and bus operators who have their own associations, and are generally seen by middle-class residents as members of the mafia.

An interesting exchange between two residents appeared recently in the reader's civic letters column of *Arcot Road Times* which highlights well the middle-class position on larger city level problems like traffic and the conflicting discourse it generates.¹³⁴ A 'concerned senior citizen' identified several traffic related issues in the area requiring 'immediate action by the state authorities'. A fellow resident responded by reminding him that it is difficult for the police 'to tackle such traffic related problems', and that one should look at volunteering to address these issues. The complainant shot back saying that the police first needs to provide at least the basic traffic amenities of pedestrian crossing and platforms, after which volunteering could be productively

¹³⁴ Problems created by new traffic system in Ashok Nagar. (2008, 2 June). *Arcot Road Times*; Response to 'Problems created by new traffic system in Ashok Nagar. (2008, 10 June). *Arcot Road Times*; Response to GPS. (2008, 12 June). *Arcot Road Times*.

discussed. These exchanges show the two contrasting positions of residents in terms of addressing traffic issues, i.e. expecting the state to carry the burden versus sharing the tasks with the state. They also suggest why initiatives like CSR fail. Partnering with the police is seen derogatively as volunteering, and much of this chapter has already shown the little stamina middle class have for such an effort.

Residents also tended to discuss traffic concerns at a microscopic (self-centred) level, resulting in a fragmented set of suggestions which could hardly be implemented by the city as a meaningful, comprehensive strategy. For instance, in the case of Arcot Road, most of the large residential complexes catering to the new middle class front directly onto Arcot Road, while the surrounding older middle class and lower class settlements are accessed by smaller roads (such as Kalamman Koil Street) perpendicular to Arcot Road (Figure 36). As part of the several flyovers built in the city, the Corporation had considered constructing one on Arcot Road but eventually decided against it. This was a major disappointment for the new middle-class residents and in the interviews they rued this missed opportunity. On the other hand, older middle-class settlements talked about the choked condition of the smaller roads leading to their colonies and felt that building a flyover would only make matters worse. The car-dependent lifestyle of the new middle class relied on the express routes that flyovers offered to bypass the miserable traffic conditions of a 'Third World' city. They didn't consider the issue that constructing a flyover involves the relocation of bus stops, and the problems it could pose for the social classes who live close by and rely on public transport.

Figure 36: Traffic issues on Arcot Road



Attempts by the police to engage the community in traffic management plans and neighbourhood crime watch will only remain aspirational in a condition where residents rely on private security guards for protection, and on private modes of transportation for commuting within the city. This indicates not only their reduced dependency on public provision of the same but also their disinclination to indulge in any kind of partnering exercises. The residents' association expect the state to provide facilities which will ensure that their use of the private means is not jeopardised. Thus, rather than partnering with the police for community neighbourhood watch, they prefer to use the police resources to compile an information database on servants and security guards, ensuring thus that their domestic interests are well guarded.¹³⁵ It is in this instance of engaging with the state that one can easily discern the residents'

¹³⁵ Although the police and residents' associations have claimed to have successfully established community police booth in several locations as part of their neighbourhood watch scheme, these booths are mostly empty. Rarely do the neighbourhood residents volunteer as patrollers. This is a sad state of affairs for, in Chennai, in many colonies there was an active culture of night patrolling with male volunteers from the neighbourhood, one that has been on the decline for many years now.

prioritising their needs as consumers but effectively enforcing their rights as citizens to do so. The interests of a citizen-consumer are in open display here. But interacting with or responding to the demands of a citizen-consumer is problematic. The hyphenated condition that exists between the citizen and the consumer is not straightforward but complex, one that is difficult to unravel. Yet the citizen-consumer is here to stay and cannot be dismissed easily.

'Consumer-citizens are here to stay'

In changing its name from Consumer Action Group to Citizen Consumer and Civic Action Group (CAG), a senior official of this prominent NGO explained that the term consumer benefits from the accountability principle built into it, and is a part of most of their work that focuses on the citizen. Elaborating this further he said:

In fact we refer to consumers today as citizen consumers, being this all encompassing group of people who are primarily citizens but are able to enforce rights and so therefore their enforcement of rights comes as citizens but the obligations and responsibilities are made accountable to them by their sort of adorning this larger citizen-consumer concept. (CAG-030904-01)

If the citizen suggests an interface with the state and the consumer with the producer or service provider, in today's entangled relationships between the state, society and market, thinking as a citizen-consumer is inevitable. According to him, consumers are not just about addressing small-scale, self-centred interests, but also important in tackling development problems:

..this concept of citizen-consumer. So it is this broader definition of individuals who are citizens and therefore they have rights as citizens but also are in some way or the other are all entitled to certain amenities, systems and infrastructure services and all of that just by virtue of them being citizens and it shouldn't be limited to their payment. Okay, so there this I would place broader responsibility on this citizen consumer concept and not try and split them up into citizens and consumers. (CAG-030904-01)

The risk here is that the citizen-consumer is perceived by the residents' associations only in terms of its more effective bargaining power. In an ideal

situation it has potential for making a positive impact on city development as the CAG official argued. Yet in reality, associations selectively assert their power as citizen-consumers, and where, mostly, the rights of the citizens are more easily invoked for consumer demands than the other way around:

I think really the future is in the associations, the associations move out of the consumer and shift closer to the citizen and therefore their rights, duties, and obligations are all seen the larger, broader context and I think really the association have, are a very potent kind of power and.....they can occupy incredible amount of space in the near future. I saw it particularly true for example with the Cable TV problem where associations were able to get individual residents not to comply with these schemes. Of course it is very sort of selfish private that sort of initiative but given that, I think that power exists. We had a meeting, was it, two years ago on this Cable TV in Madras and we took the Music Academy Hall. It was overflowing, and when, it is ironical, because we had a year before that a meeting on the lack of open spaces in the city and how the existing open spaces were being privatised and we had ten people in the audience. So that just shows you where priorities are. (CAG-030904-01)

The unreliability of these associations became evident when, of the 50-60 associations that signed up for CAG membership at the height of the above crisis, only 5-10 renewed their membership the following year. This goes back to the fundamental trait of residents' associations observed in the early parts of this chapter – they are constructed in response to a crisis and find it hard to sustain themselves in the absence of one, learning the harsh way that common issues are not the hard issues. If traditionally the middle class have been wary about establishing a direct interface with the politicians, then the recent political transformations in the city haven't succeeded in quelling their suspicions and fear. Instead, the bourgeois jargon of the state has created a rather confident citizen-consumer class, where (s)he is slyly learning to make citizen demands from the state for meeting their consumer needs.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the collective action of the middle-class residents' associations, amidst the premise that neo-liberalisation has created a clement climate for middle-class residents, whose aspirations are aided by clear

'bourgeois' pursuits of the state. The investigation explored the way their residents' associations have utilised this opportunity of resonating together with the state and other actors in the creation of a bourgeois urbanism. The first sections showed that while the postcolonial evolution of the residential morphology in the city resulted in fragmentation and internalisation of the residential associations, a sense of empowerment of the residents' associations abetted by their recent trend of institutionalisation is prevalent. The accompanying phenomenon of corporatisation though raises the question of how the associations would utilise their new found powers – would they use their collective bargaining to merely better their consumerist quest or would they apply it to become a meaningful partner in the emerging new geography of governance. Middle-class residents associations were tested for their penchant for partnership, and were assessed for their willingness to engage formally with other residents' associations (including the political society of the lower classes and the poor), with 'proper' civil society organisations and NGOs, and with the state.

A major stumbling block was the inherent inability of the middle-class residents' associations to federate. While natural inhibition prevents them from aligning with other middle or upper class resident groups, cross-class alliances were found to be seriously disadvantaged by a sense of patronage that the middle class hold towards the poor and the lower classes. Furthermore, an increased self-acknowledgement of the new middle class as the 'proper citizens' of the city has resulted in a heightened incrimination of the poor indicating lesser proclivities to align with them. Irrespective of the dominance of the middle class in terms of membership in civil society organisations and NGOs, their residents' associations display little tendency to engage or partner with these 'proper' institutions. This was despite the fact that many of the associations identified the 'informality' and 'limitedness' of their operations, and recognised the need for civil society groups to take up larger causes and concerns. Yet, when the opportunity for partnering was presented, as illustrated through the example of *Puduvellam*, residents' associations failed to capitalise

on the initiative. Several reasons contributed to this failure including cultural prejudices which meant that the mostly upper-caste middle-class community was reluctant to participate in the physical cleaning activities and 'get its hands dirty'. Instead, they preferred to engage with the effort as individual patrons. Their responses were also influenced by superior assumptions that grass-roots initiatives are only for the poor and the deprived, i.e. for the have-nots, not for the haves. This rejection was also aided by the reliance of the middle class on private means of service provision making them less willing to partner in public engagements.

Public services in the city are now being procured from private suppliers, with most residents' associations preferring this alternative. In this context, state level exercises requiring the participation of middle-class residents as partners prove to be a damp squib, as the recent *Citizen for Safe Roads* initiative showed. Middle-class associations in this scenario revealed their bargaining position as citizen-consumers, wherein they call upon the state invoking their rights as citizens to safeguard their interests, now secured through their consumerist bargaining. Though there is a recognition of the significant role of citizen-consumers in addressing city development issues, it is not clear if presenting the residents as citizen-consumers enables them to take on an enlarged role. The balance is clearly tipped in the hyphenated condition where the resident as a consumer cleverly deploys him-/herself as a citizen for his-/her own consumption gains.

In this scenario, there is not only a sense of uselessness in whipping up a citizen-like frenzy, but also some amount of harm and danger as much of this mass coalescence is wasted over an ideology of privatism and individualism. As a large proportion of the middle-class lifestyle choices are provided for within the four walls of their residential complexes, residents become accustomed to a self-imposed internality based on fee-paying consumption practices, yielding a disengaged condition from the 'outside realm'. Middle-class residents' associations behave like closed associations of modern elite

groups sequestered from the wider popular life of the communities. Even if their empowerment creates a forum for discussion, it mainly involves discussions of their highly privatised and internalised interests in safe conditioned environments. The prospect of residents' associations functioning in a kind of alternative civil society platform appears dim. As they operate in privatised spaces outside of a public sphere, it raises the question as to whether and how they valorise public sphere, given their tendency to impose a negative externality on what is outside their complex. In this context, it is useful to explore the middle-class perceptions and imaginations of the public spaces within the city. This constitutes the topic of enquiry for the next chapter.

6

Public Spaces: Ordering and Othering

In Madras the bus station near the High Court is one of the more popular latrines. The traveller arrives; to pass the time he raises his dhoti, defecates in the gutter.....Still in Madras, observe this bespectacled patriarch walking past the University on the Marina...he squats, pisses on the pavement, leisurely rises;....and continues on his promenade. It is a popular evening walk, this Marina; but no one looks, no face is averted in embarrassment. (Naipaul 1964: 69)

Referring to the above observation, Chakrabarty (1992) highlights Naipaul's continued orientalist-modernist preoccupation with dirt, even if his vision of India had evolved over nearly three decades from being *An Area of Darkness* (1964) to *A Million Mutinies Now* (1990).¹³⁶ Nevertheless there is a perceptible change in his observation of Indians' general disregard for the unwholesome aspects of their public places. In *An Area of Darkness* he reveals extreme disgust at Indians defecating everywhere, be it on the railway tracks, the beaches, the rivers, the hills or the streets, a habit apparently common to all classes of Indians, as he says '[w]hen they are done they advance...They climb back on to the avenue, *jump on their cycles or get into their cars*, and go away' (1964: 70, emphasis added). In 1990, amidst the persistent dirt, he notices that the increased wealth and rise of new particularities and identities has fuelled the rise of a middle-class anguish and anxiety towards dirt and poverty, as

¹³⁶ Naipaul's observations are in fact a revered reference for any scholar working on the same issue, dating back to Mary Douglas (1966). In this sense, this chapter beginning with Naipaul is no exception.

shanty-towns spring up close to their modest and clean settlements. He contrasts the middle-class suburb of Sion located next to the slum of Dharavi (purportedly the largest slum in Asia), and says that the former is the Bombay one knew, the Bombay of paved roads, buses and people in lightweight clothes, while the latter, a swamp, suffers from the stench of excrement and dust. It is clear that unlike his self-confessed 'brown Englishman's' eyes that saw crowd, and its associated characteristic of filth, without class distinction in the 1960s, he was now able to vaguely delineate the geography of two divided cities, one rather clean and somewhat spacious, and the other crowded and dirty, a spatial delineation underwritten by class lines (*Chapter Four*).

If in 1964, Naipaul's eyes captured a 'bespectacled patriarch' dirtying the public space, in 1990 he observes 'depressed-looking dark people' sitting in the dirt and eating their food indifferent to everything else. In the former, one can well see one of the many middle-class Indians using or rather abusing the public spaces just like everyone else. Travelling in India in the 1960s, he recounts tales of a certain class of Indians (the English-speaking middle-class to be specific) who had 'a passionate urge to explain to the visitor that they must not be considered part of poor, dirty India, that their values and standards are higher, and they live perpetually outraged by the country which gives them their livelihood', but who after complaining 'with feeling about the indiscipline and crudity of Indians, proceeded...to change his clothes in public' (2002 [1962]: 6-7). In 1990, he refers to the large swell of the poor and the destitute who, in the absence of shelter, choose to conduct their domesticity in the public spaces of the city (see Kaviraj 1997). So, in making this distinction, does Naipaul imply a larger question? Would his now-accustomed eyes have caught anything more substantial if he had arrived a few years later, after the formal onset of the economic reforms in 1991? Would he find the men and women of the middle class a drastically changed lot?

In all probability, today, Naipaul would still find middle-class citizens getting out of their cars and joining the line of squatting pissers on the road. An

elderly resident remarking on the way people used the open space abutting her middle-class residential complex said:

Here on this side it is open, like an open ground, that is a public toilet, if you see in the morning.....in India, in general, there is no hygiene awareness, even an educated person, you can't find fault with the uneducated people. They [the educated people] will take the trouble of getting down from the car or scooter to dirty on the road. I have seen that.
(ECR-020904-02)

So, what has changed? *Chapter Four* observed in Chennai the enhanced contrast of socio-economic inequalities with the onset of neoliberalisation, one that is possibly heightened by the re-emergence of the middle class asserting their claims to the city and its public spaces. Accompanying their renaissance is a vocal urge to explain that they are not 'part of the poor, dirty India', and that they aspire to a higher quality environment. By reclaiming the urban landscape, this social class wishes to restore some semblance of propriety to the city. While as individuals they may not have come clean of certain cultural habits such as urinating in public spaces (an act blessed by class ubiquity), what is happening is that, ennobled by neo-liberalisation, middle-class citizens have for the first time structurally organised themselves into institutions whose sole objective, under the guise of rejuvenated civic responsibilities, is to claim their right to an unhindered access to a clean and healthy environment (Chatterjee 2004).

As they collectively rally themselves together to assert their public consciousness, it should be noted that the middle-class organisations are not alone in this pursuit. *Chapter Four* discussed the role of the state in improving the economic fortunes of the city, particularly through appropriate material representations. While recent transport schemes contributing to this strategy were discussed in that chapter, another equally powerful asset to market to potential investors is the city's public spaces. Capital is for the first time being lavished by the state to improve the public arena and repackage it in an attractive format. As the city's 'public face', these spaces are crucial to embrace and seduce global capital. With the state and its citizens engaging

with the re-imagination of public spaces, the condition seems ripe for forging a 'politics of partnership'. The bourgeois essentials underwritten in the pursuit of the public spaces suggest an easy convergence between the desires and interests of a bourgeois state and the middle-class civic organisations (Baviskar 2003; Fernandes 2004). And yet, as seen in the previous chapter, this is not a simple case of conjoint pursuit where alliances are easily formed. Rather a complex condition is suspected where affiliations between the different actors oscillate between coalition and conflict, thus rendering useless a simplistic assumption about middle-class citizenship claims via a reconstructed bourgeois public sphere.

This is illustrated through an examination of recent attempts at transforming the beaches of Chennai. With nearly 20 Km of sandy stretch, Chennai prides itself in possessing several beaches including the most popular Marina Beach, Santhome Beach, Elliot's Beach, and the newly developed stretch of New Beach in Thiruvanmiyur (Figure 37). Much of the popular discourse has been dominated by attempts of the state and the civic institutions to re-imagine Marina as a presentable banner to a global audience. This chapter examines first the scripting by the postcolonial state of a globalised aesthetic imagery for the Marina. The reactions that the state proposals triggered amongst the bourgeois civil society institutions (mainly heritage and environmental groups) and the political society of the fishermen communities will be explored, as well as the specific forms of partnership that emerged between these actors.

The second part of the chapter focuses on the debates surrounding the southern beach stretch along ECR, particularly the New Beach. Here, the role of the state is considerably reduced, with bourgeois civil society limited to the shoreline middle-class residents' associations. This section therefore considers the dominant role of residents-led initiatives in framing a beach imaginary (mainly around the concerns of dirt and danger), and their ensuing politics of partnership with the state and the fishermen. The debates surrounding the

Marina and the southern beaches reveal a stringent practice of ordering followed by a differentiated process of othering to reinforce a single dominant perspective. It is via an understanding of the mechanics of ordering and othering employed in each case that both case studies are analysed.

Figure 37: Beaches of Chennai



6.1 The making of the Marina

Chapter Four discussed the foundation of Madras as a city that was never meant to be and noted its characteristic lack of (and appreciation of) natural features. The only advantage was that in a coastline with few natural harbours, it provided for ships to come close to the shore. But its evolution does display the morphology of a colonial port city, where its 5 Km beach stretch north of the Cooum River became crucial for the mercantile activities of the British East India Company. After the establishment of the imperial government in 1858 and the declaration of Madras as a Presidency capital, sites along a 3 Km seafront stretch south of the Cooum River were chosen for housing new administrative and institutional facilities. With the extension of this southern stretch, the British decided to make the oceanfront accessible to the public and a broad boulevard was constructed in 1884. Evoking old Sicilian recollections to create 'one of the most beautiful promenades in the world', the new boulevard was named the Marina (Evenson 1989: 9; Figure 38).

Figure 38: Historic images of the beach, Chennai



Source: <http://www.madraschennaiphotographs.com> retrieved 28 May, 2007;
© Vintage Vignettes, Chennai; Left is a view along North Beach Road while right offers a view of the Marina with the colonial institutions in the background.

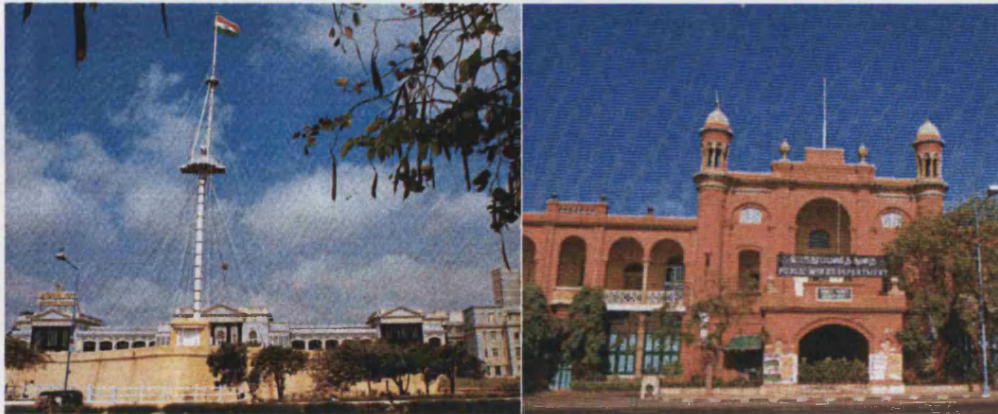
Colonial administrators took pride in this transformation, as an intervention unique to their legacy and unknown to the earlier precolonial period. Through this development they sought to establish a new system of public spaces which was effectively used to display their colonial power as well as more

benevolently emphasise concerns about public health, providing ‘the natives’ with a healthy educative civic life. Thus, walking, driving carriages, riding horses and listening to the music played at the military bandstand were some of the fashionable pastimes of the Europeans and native elite, with the colonisers keeping a tight watch on those who used the space through strict prescriptions on dress and behavioural codes (Srivathsan 2000).

In due course, the use of public spaces and the beach in particular changed. *Chapter Two* has already mentioned that the British-created Indian middle class spearheaded the rise of a nationalist movement for independence. Public arenas became crucial for the Indian elites to express antagonism to the colonial state, and to garner support from the masses (Kaviraj 1997). Thus, in Madras, Marina became a key site for staging the spectacle of inversion where the colonised were no longer passive spectators to the display of colonial power but active protestors challenging their dominance and hegemony. After independence, Marina played a crucial role in the assertion of the postcolonial state. In the first instance, different departments of the government occupied the colonial buildings dotting the seafront with the legislative assembly and the state Secretariat moving into the Fort St. George complex at the northern end of the Marina (Figure 39). Secondly, the expansive stretch of the Marina provided the Dravidian state with an enviable backdrop onto which it could physically inscribe its politics of Tamil cultural nationalism, mostly in the form of statues, monuments and memorials (*Chapter Four*, Figure 40).¹³⁷

¹³⁷ The memorials of former Chief Ministers CN Annadurai and MG Ramachandran are located on the Marina, and are today popular tourist destinations.

Figure 39: Postcolonial governance from colonial remnants, Chennai



Source: Muthiah (1990: 21, 32; © Ajay Khullar)

Figure 40: Memorials on Marina Beach, Chennai



Clockwise from top left – Anna memorial, MGR memorial, triumph of labour statue, Gandhi statue, and Kannagi statue

But by the 1990s, there was a closure of sorts to this use of public spaces to convey a particular sense of regional identity. With the onset of neoliberal economic reforms, prominent public spaces like the Marina assumed renewed significance as a banner to attract transnationalised investment. As the most visible and popular public space, Marina symbolises an important source of publicity for the city. Thus, the Dravidian state adopted a new strategy to orchestrate its representation through a reprocessed urban imaginary that is

congenial for global capital investment. Since this coincides with the embourgeoisement of the Dravidian state (*Chapter Four*), it suggests an employment of a bourgeois vocabulary in its re-imagination. It also implies an assumption that such a move will undoubtedly find favour with the bourgeois sections of the society. Subscribing to the latter is presumptuous, given that elites assuming various positions in the decision-making process are not necessarily unanimous (Alley 1997). The following section focuses on two specific attempts of the state in 2003 to analyse its transnationalised, bourgeois re-imagination of the Marina, and also charts the multiplicity of voices that rose in response to its gestures, some in complicity and others in contrariety.

6.1.1 Global dreams on the Marina, and the ensuing nightmares

Despite the state's initial reliance on public spaces like the Marina to narrate its political ideology, public spaces eventually took a backseat amidst the overwhelming problems of postcolonial governance, revolving around the provision of basic amenities such as housing, education, health, roads, water and sanitation. As the public spaces in the city slowly fell into neglect and decay, the weak institutional nature of the local government and scarce finances made matters worse. In the case of the Marina, at least three authorities overlapped in their responsibility for the beach. While the Corporation was in-charge of the general maintenance and beautification of the beach, the maintenance of the roads, buildings and structures on the beach fell under the portfolio of the Public Works Department (PWD), and the Revenue Department was responsible for the removal of encroachments.¹³⁸ Following the dissolution of the Corporation in 1973 (*Chapter Four*), the state entrusted the newly-formed Madras Metropolitan Development authority (MMDA) with the responsibility of drafting an integrated development plan for the beach, and a Marina Development Committee was set up in 1979. A plan was long in the

¹³⁸ Since 1996, the Corporation is responsible for the maintenance of the entire stretch, with the PWD taking care of the memorials on the beach. There has also been some concerted effort in coordinating the upkeep exercises of these different bodies at a more regular level. The government announced in 2003 the formation of a state-level beach authority, with a separate committee for Chennai, but with the change of government in 2006, this body remains inactive.

making and it was not until 1993 that a recommendations report was submitted to the government. Schemes for beach beautification were drawn up with proposals for improving amenities in the area.

The release of the report coincided with the implementation of economic reforms, and the government decided to use its recommendations, launching a few schemes to clean and beautify the Marina. A Madras Vision 2000 strategy was announced in 1993, and the proposals for beach beautification were incorporated within this plan. Since then this 3.5 Km stretch has undergone some amount of facial uplift with amenities including improved walkways, pedestrian plazas, additional parking space for vehicles, children play areas, high mast lights, police patrolling and lawns in the forefront (Figure 41).¹³⁹ But by the new millennium, such efforts had hardly made an impact, and the vitality of Marina to portray the global ambitions of the city became more urgent. It was in this context that the ADMK state government led by Jayalalithaa announced in 2003 two ambitious proposals for transforming the Marina. These proposals involved structural interventions beyond the cosmetic improvements undertaken so far and offered a completely revamped imaginary for the Marina, evoking strong reactions from the citizens.

¹³⁹ Announced by Jayalalithaa's ADMK government, Madras Vision 2000 was abandoned by the DMK when it came to power in 1996. Beach beautification was in fact the only visible realisation of this programme. Even then there was a problem with these beautification efforts as they were intermittent, with the beach often relapsing into its dishevelled look within a few months.

Figure 41: Marina promenade, Chennai



Source: Muthiah (1990: 45; © Ajay Khullar)

In January 2003, the state government reviewed the ten year old plan of the MMDA for the beautification of the Marina, and signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB) of Malaysia, handing the responsibility of the project to the latter. That this was a mega-scale vision was clear from the budget set at Rs. 1000 crores. The Marina beautification, planned for completion within six years, spanned a 1.5 Km stretch and included proposals for ‘complexes of international standards to provide office accommodation for multinationals and embassies’.¹⁴⁰ The strength of the ‘we are going global’ signal was obvious, as the proposal talked confidently about global collaborations, targeting a global community, and the need to create a global architecture. Marina beach, not unlike earlier times, was again going to be the cloth from which these visions

¹⁴⁰ MoU on dream projects with Malaysia. (2003, 15 January). *The Hindu*, p. 3.

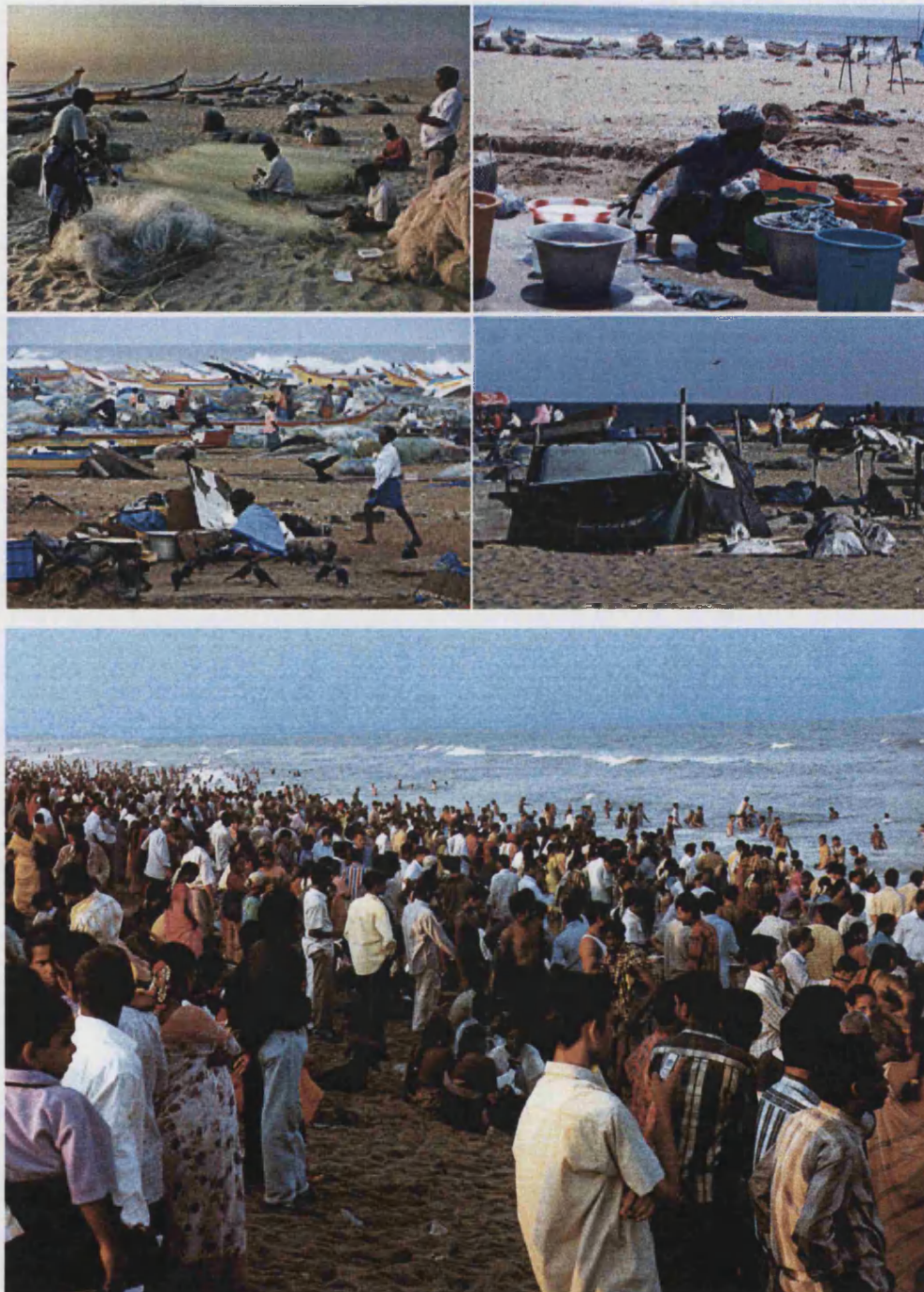
would be cut and tailored. The aggressiveness of the state government was evident from the way it paid little heed to an earlier decision to protect and conserve the colonial skyline of the Marina.¹⁴¹ As it openly acknowledged the need to relocate the residents of the fishing hamlets, the announcement provoked strong reaction not only from the fishermen communities, but also civil society groups. This resulted in specific expressions of alliance in the complex 'politics of partnership' game involving these particular attempts to globally locate the city.

The state, fishermen and the environment: an entangled net

This wasn't the first time that the government was announcing its intentions to relocate fishermen. Their presence has constantly been a reminder of the ambiguous nature of public spaces in a postcolonial setting. The practices of fishermen communities and their villages (*kuppams*) are based on an understanding of 'commonness' rather than 'publicness'. This relates to their conduct of common activities including the parking of their catamarans, drying their nets, the fish, clothing and utensils on the sands, digging shallow wells for water, and in many cases using the wet sands as open-air defecation areas. In the postcolonial years, those who relied on the beach as a public space found their bourgeois sensibilities clashing with the common activities of the fishermen (Figure 42). Accompanying this conflicting understanding was the efforts of consecutive governments to subordinate the fishermen and control their use of the beach.

¹⁴¹ In the 1950s when the question of the direction of urban development of the city was being discussed amidst pressures to decolonise the cityscape, the then Chief Minister C Rajagopalachari had regulations stipulated banning high-rise constructions on the Marina, insisting on preservation and the need to resist such tendencies.

Figure 42: 'Common' and 'public' uses of the beach



Source: Top four photos – www.flickr.com, retrieved 10 August, 2008; Bottom – Venkatachalapathy (2006: 128; © Aravindan 2006). The top four pictures indicate the various uses of the beach by the fishermen communities living along the shore, while the bottom picture reflects the use of the beach by the general public who see it as a crucial 'lung' space in a city starved of open spaces.

In the 1970s, the Tamil Nadu government constituted the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board (TNSCB) to undertake the clearance or improvement of slum areas with the objective of the eventual elimination of slums within the cities. Without elaborating much on its criteria for defining a slum, fishermen *kuppams* on the beach were classified as slums and chosen for resettlement, connoting illegitimisation of fishermen presence on the beach. Slums in the city reflected a process of encroachment on land that didn't belong to the settlers who through the act of squatting violated the proprietary notions of ownership. By clubbing the *kuppams* with the slums, the government decreed fishermen's appropriation of the beach as an act of squatting, thus requiring the intervention of the law. In some cases their huts were demolished with tenement structures constructed on the same locations, and in other cases they were relocated inland farther away from the beach. But in due course, fishermen ignored these new housing allocations (often renting them out) and returned to their original locations closer to the beach, reconstructing their hutment dwellings. That the government policies on slum resettlement was hardly informed by the cultural practices of the poor was clear by the choice made by the fishermen to return to their earlier housing form. But it is not just the state that viewed the *kuppams* in this light, but the print media as well. In 1996, a write-up in *The Hindu* brought attention to squalor on the shores of the Marina:

The 3.5 km long beach, which boasts of a breathtaking broad expanse of sand, should automatically lead to visions of beach umbrellas, Frisbees and plain fun. Yet, the Marina has never made it to the big league of world famous beaches.....A fresh danger threatens the beachface now. It could well acquire the dubious distinction of being the "*longest slum*" if the mushroom growth of huts all along the shore continues. (emphasis added).¹⁴²

¹⁴² Vydianathan, S. (1996, 16 September). Squalor on the shore. *The Hindu*, p. Metro I.

While acknowledging the question of tourist interest versus the convenience of fishermen, the report referred to the fishermen as 'slumdwellers' who had made the beach less attractive for visitors.

The state, instead of learning some valuable lessons from these failed attempts at relocation, persisted with its policies on the beach. All through the 1980s, fishermen activities were subject to strict controls, in terms of where they could park their catamarans, and where they could dry their fish and nets. By the mid-1980s, things came to a combative stand when, after several directives, in November 1985, catamarans and fishing gear were seized by the police from the Marina.¹⁴³ Fishermen's agitations to reclaim their possessions turned violent, and in December, in an encounter with the police, six people were killed and about a hundred injured. Finally, the Supreme Court directed the government to return to the fishermen their catamarans and gear, with another attempt by the state to regulate the fishermen leaving a bloody trail. The bitterness of this violent clash marred the populist reputation of the state government and for a while, an uneasy truce existed between the state and the fishermen. The state's efforts were limited to superficial improvements on the foreshore of the beach and it refrained from interfering with the fishermen clusters close to the water. But with the dawn of the new millennium and the heightened global aspirations of the city, the state gave up its policy of subdued interventions on the beach. Through the MoU with the Malaysian government, it aggressively sought to promote Marina's transformation into a transnational corridor, involving yet again the relocation of fishermen.

Fishermen resist resettlement on the basis that there is a strong sense of territoriality attached to their fishing: "Fishermen from each *kuppam* (hamlet) fish only in a particular stretch of the sea and moving into another *kuppam*'s territory causes violent fights.....Forcing 60,000 of us from four different

¹⁴³ In this particular instance, clean-up activities were associated with the visit of Pope Jean Paul XXIII to the city in December 1985, and who was scheduled to address a mass gathering at the Marina.

kuppams to live in one small area will cause havoc".¹⁴⁴ Emphasising the futility of relocating the fishermen inland, a fisherman argued:

Now, we, we shouldn't lose the beach, we feel our rights are being taken away. If you take us and put us in Perambur, where there is a housing or slum board, if you put us there how will we survive? You should give us employment, that is too difficult. Even if you give us employment, we should know the trade, right. (ECR-090404-02)¹⁴⁵

In this particular instance, fishermen found support from environmental NGOs and activists in the city. This wasn't surprising, since over the years, many environmental NGOs have aligned themselves with fishermen's problems, particularly the artisanal fishermen, residing along the Marina and southwards. Artisanal fishermen still use their catamarans, as opposed to the highly mechanised fishing in the north of the city. They are restricted in terms of the distance they go into the sea, and along with the general problems of pollution and climate change, have suffered massive decreases in their catch. In this situation, the state seemed to imply that instead of holding onto a losing proposition, fishermen are better off giving up their claims to the coast and relocating elsewhere.

But fishermen resist such proposals. Their resistance were supported by Medha Patkar, an environmental activist of national repute who for many years has rallied against the construction of dam projects in India. She came to the city in February 2003 to lead a protest against the proposed eviction of the fishermen, demanding their participation as stakeholders in any plans to beautify the beach. Barely had the government responded to the agitation of activists like Patkar against the proposed displacement of fishermen, when a few months later, the government made another announcement, again related to the Marina. This snowballed yet again into a crisis and created further opposition to the state's global dreams for the Marina.

¹⁴⁴ Kamat, A. (2003, 15-28 February). 'Beautification' at what cost? *Frontline*.

¹⁴⁵ He was referring to Perambur as this is an inland neighbourhood, also housing mostly the poor and lower classes, but far from the shoreline and hence a complete dislocation for the fishermen.

Getting rid of heritage, and rewriting history

On 4 April 2003, Chief Minister Jayalalithaa informed the State Assembly that the “run-down” buildings on the 30-acre, 88-year old Queen Mary’s College (QMC) on the Marina would be razed to make way for a brand new secretariat complex. In January 2003, along with the Marina Beautification Plan commissioned to the Malaysian government, a proposal was made for an administrative city, comprising of the Assembly, the Secretariat, and all government offices. When initial feasibility studies concluded that the project would take at least fifteen years to implement, the government opted to put this proposal on hold and look for an immediate alternative, narrowing down its option to the QMC site (Figure 43).

Figure 43: Proposals for the Marina



Aerial photograph © 2008 Microsoft Corporation

Within hours of the announcement, students of QMC had organised a 'Save QMC' movement, and while they kept vigil in the campus, 9 writ-petitions were filed in the Madras High Court from various organisations. This included the Citizen, Consumer and Civic Action Group (CAG) and the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), basing their arguments on the violation of environmental and heritage regulations. The students' protest caught the sympathy and support of citizens across the city. Residents of *Nochikuppam* on the Marina, which only a few months earlier had been marked for relocation, gathered outside the college in support of the students. The fishermen's interests were intertwined with that of the college as almost 400 girls from their community were studying in the QMC, and the fishermen feared that the current demolition plans will affect their one chance to gain education.¹⁴⁶

While two redevelopment proposals within a span of few months seemed like a fast-track way of implementing a global vision, opposition to these initiatives was equally expedient. Within 48 hours, an interim injunction was obtained from the Madras High Court, staying the demolition temporarily, and an indefinite stay procured four days later. 40,000 signatures protesting the proposed demolition were collected from different sections of the society. Opposition parties also tried to gain political leverage from this crisis, which came to a heady halt, when on 22 April, the Union Ministry of Environment and Forestry imposed a blanket ban on demolition and reconstruction of heritage and historic buildings, and buildings of public use, including those used for education, on coastal stretches. There was political malice involved in this decision, as the notification removed authority from the state for coastal developments, most importantly its large-scale plans to transform the Marina.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Besides being the oldest institution in the state, as an all-girls college it catered to the education of women from the socio-economically deprived parts of the society.

¹⁴⁷ The fact that the Union Minister for Environment and Forestry was TR Balu, a member of the DMK, an opposition party in Tamil Nadu played a large role in issuing the order swiftly. Earlier, members of the DMK, the communist parties and other political groups had openly

The success of the 'Save QMC' movement was a cause for jubilation amongst many. Muthiah, the popular city historian and a heritage activist wrote that:

the most heart-warming sign of positive action in Tamil Nadu in recent years was the steps the girls of Queen Mary's College and their faculty took.....as well as members of the several public, to prevent the takeover of the campus by the Government to build a Secretariat on it....in threatening the Queen Mary's campus, an even bigger threat is being posed to the city by endangering its biggest lung and public space, the Marina. Such heritage and environmental issues are causes today to fight for as passionately as for one's campus.¹⁴⁸

Not willing to be pinned down by this debacle, the Chief Minister hit back, insisting that those who claim for heritage and environment preservation are "elitist" and represent "self-proclaimed NGOs". And yet, as the representative of CAG (one of the NGOs that had filed a writ-petition against the proposed demolition of QMC) explained, it was truly a case of cooperative effort where

....the CAG filed a case as well and in fact we did, it was a part of our common strategy. We sat together with the students, the teachers, and everyone and drafted a strategy that required the students to go first, then the teachers to go second, because we can get dismissed very easily by saying, X, Y and Z, because Jayalalithaa knows us, but the other way around, to getting the students out was very important. (CAG-030904-01)

These agitations over the transformation of the Marina seem to suggest a more successful example of the new politics of partnership, where civil society groups comprising mostly of middle-class activists established a comfortable alliance with the fishermen and student groups, in opposition to a dominant, bourgeois state. But then Marina was an extreme example where the state's global visions had turned into an unbearable glare. As a result, almost every non-state actor was forced into coalition in order to eclipse this effect. It is

criticised the government, registering their support for the student community. Several of them, including MK Stalin from the DMK (the former city mayor) were also arrested in this regard.

¹⁴⁸ Muthiah, S. (2003, 4 April). The girls of Queen Mary's. *The Hindu*, p. Metro Plus 5.

relevant to ask whether, In a 'normal case' scenario, the voices would be so united. Probably not, as seen in the subsequent efforts of the state.

Back to square one: checkerboard of reactions

While the above two particular proposals came to a halt, the government remained undaunted, and in August 2003, smaller structures on the Marina were demolished. This included Seerani Arangam, a popular venue for holding public rallies, amongst a few other buildings.¹⁴⁹ While the opposition party, the DMK filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in the court, these demolitions surprisingly did not evoke much reaction from either the fishermen or the middle-class activists. In fact, there was a quiet sense of acquiescence amongst the latter.

Seerani Arangam has considerable historic significance, almost as much as the QMC. This was where the physical display of 'inversion of power' against the colonial British took place, as the nationalist leaders used the power of the spectacle to raise calls for independence during many public meetings.¹⁵⁰ While city historian Muthiah acknowledged that 'such a site deserves better than man-made rocks, fountains and fauna', referring to the state proposal to replace the structure with a landscaped fountain, *Madras Musings*, a bimonthly newsletter published by him reported in 2003 that:

..we are not exactly unhappy over the demolition of Seerani Arangam and the consequent banning of public meetings and constructions on the beach, as part of the efforts to keep the Marina and beach clean.....there was no permanent construction of any kind at this historic site in those days. In 1968, a group of volunteers, the Seerani Force, raised Seerani Arangam, during the regime of CN Annadurai, but over the years, it has become an eyesore, dilapidated by the day, marring the beauty of the Marina. But worse, the numerous meetings held at the site have posed an environmental threat to the Marina, traffic congestion has worsened, and there have also been many instances of hooliganism let loose on the unwary beachgoer during such meetings, not all of them political. Anti-

¹⁴⁹ Marina's eyesore demolished in midnight operation. (2003, 26 September). *New Indian Express*, p. 3.

¹⁵⁰ Muthiah, S. (2005, 26 September). Gandhiji and Thilakar Thidal. *The Hindu*, p. Metro Plus 5.

social activities in the shadow of the Arangam have also thrived, we understand. Not so long ago, the CMDA Heritage Committee, and the Save the Marina Committee, in both of which there was non-governmental and private sector participation, had agreed that Seerani Arangam should be demolished. As we understand it, the suggestion to demolish Seerani Arangam at the meetings was pushed by the non-governmental participants. Obviously no one felt very strongly about Seerani Arangam.¹⁵¹

The judiciary too seemed to ratify the efforts of the government in this instance. In response to the PIL, the Chief Justice asked if there was anything wrong in razing structures 'for beautifying the beach or for at least restoring its old glory', failing to note that 'restoring its old glory' involved erasing historic structures.¹⁵² CAG seemed to be the only one to read deeper into its demolition:

No, because it was a public space and a meeting space. So no it isn't and finally the bottom end is the beach is a public space.....Not allowing permanent structures on the beach, yes, is a good idea, yes we do agree with it. But the structure that was demolished, was demolished because of the state's allergy to public meetings which are not controlled by them. I think that was a bad sign, a very, very bad sign. (CAG-030904-01)

It is clear that the crisis related to the relocation of the fishermen and the QMC represented a boiling point where activists from all classes were able to rally together against state action. Once abated, they went back to their own tasks. The enunciation of their opinions on the demolition of Seerani Arangam illustrates the infeasibility of resonating together on every single occasion. This diversity of civil society groups is not only indicative of the richness of democracy but also reveals the fluidity of the politics of partnership that emerges in the new geography of governance. Alliances are temporal, depending very much on the demands of the situation. What needs to be specifically acknowledged in terms of the public spaces is that there is not one single template from which the arguments pertaining to its imagination can be drawn. For a city that is blessed with nearly 20 Km of beachfront and several

¹⁵¹ The portents in a demolition. (2003, 16-31 August). *Madras Musings*, p. 3.

¹⁵² Subramani, A. (2003, 21 August). No move to demolish memorials: Govt. *The Hindu*, p. 3.

beach stretches, it also means that the debates that evolved on the Marina wouldn't necessarily be applicable in the other stretches, let alone other type of open spaces.

In discussing the urban public realm, Beauregard and Bounds (2000) differentiate between public and the parochial spaces, explaining that public spaces are the ones where interests and identities are publicised to city wide and even national audiences (and transnational ones as well), whereas, in parochial spaces, deliberations of social collectivities remain restricted to similar interest affinity groups. The ability of the civil society organisations to develop from an associational to institutional status determines to a large extent whether the dialogue over a particular open space is constructed on a public or parochial level. In this context, it would be useful to examine the beach discourse constructed by the middle-class residents' associations residing along the southern shoreline, and will be addressed in the next section focussing primarily on Valmiki Nagar and New Beach in Thiruvananthapuram, and to a less extent on Neelanganai Beach (Figure 44).

Figure 44: Case study beaches in southern Chennai



6.2 Residing along the shoreline

Ironically, for a city that owes its colonial foundation to its oceanfront, neither did its colonial settlers nor its indigenous colonised communities have a taste for seaside residence. The seafront was viewed advantageously purely from a commercial perspective. Even when, in the later part of the nineteenth century, a promenade was developed along the beach for leisure and recreational purposes, much of the residential development was inland, and the shoreline south of the Adyar River remained unmolested. But, in the post-independence decades, as existing neighbourhoods became congested, reeling under uncontrolled urbanisation, better-off residents began to look for alternative residential locations. It was in such a pursuit that, in 1958, a judge of the Madras High Court, Justice Balakrishna Iyer, purchased a piece of land along the coast south of the village of Thiruvannamiyur to build his retirement home.¹⁵³ Iyer saw value in the unspoilt nature of the beachside property, and envisioning a potential for further development, had the area plotted in the early 1960s as half-acre to one-acre residential parcels. A primary north-south road with four secondary seaward roads running east-west constituted the basic layout. The development was initially named as Judges' Colony, renamed as Valmiki Nagar by the Corporation in 1978.

In subsequent years, in villages like Neelangarai (two miles further south of Valmiki Nagar), the beachfront was similarly plotted and sold to affluent residents from the city. But it was not just the upper classes who acknowledged the value of this shift to the southern shoreline. The state realised the impossibility of providing housing within the city and acquired large parcels of land along ECR for state-led housing developments. Neighbourhoods along ECR thus represented a heterogeneous mix of different classes (*Chapter Three*). By the late-1980s and early 1990s, with the

¹⁵³ Lawrence, J. (1995, 03 December - 06 January). Valmiki Nagar - a three-part series on an Adyar neighbourhood. *Adayar Times*, p. 6; Also based on resident interviews ECR-010304-01 and ECR-150304-01

development of multiple-dwelling flat complexes in areas like Valmiki Nagar, a dense, cosmopolitan character pervaded the place. Through a combination of deliberate orchestration and accumulation by degrees, neighbourhoods like Valmiki Nagar began to signify a specific image for the new middle class. Living in Valmiki Nagar by the beach became a metaphor for a desirable way of life:

I was always um fascinated by the coast....I always preferred to live...you know close to the sea and there was even during a hot summer day, you know, sea breeze would set in early and stuff like that. So when I got the opportunity to buy a flat I looked at areas you know close to the coast and Valmiki Nagar happened to be one of them ...Valmiki Nagar was open and sandy with open spaces and things like that when I moved in. (ECR-310304-01)

..very close to the beach which I always wanted right from my young age. Even though I never have the habit of getting up early, I always feel that we should get up early, go to the beach, was one of my dreams. So probably at my age of forty, this dream might come true. (ECR-140304-01)

Despite the air of exclusivity, Valmiki Nagar residents have had to collectively organise themselves for obtaining basic amenities, just like any other middle-class colony (*Chapter Five*). Amidst concerns of the neighbourhood's general upkeep, they also began to worry about the beach, which, in the absence of sustained maintenance effort by the Town Panchayat first and more recently the Corporation, became nobody's concern.¹⁵⁴ Decades of fast-paced urbanisation began to take a toll on the beach, and the residents realised that it was no longer a premium but a liability. Initial attempts of the residents reflected an extended application of the mindset of their associations to maintain the beach. Initially the Valmiki Nagar Fourth Seaward Road association decided to extend its spatial remit to the beach, and from this effort a separate organisation called the *Beach Buddies* emerged to address exclusively the concerns of the beach.

¹⁵⁴ Valmiki Nagar was under the purview of Thiruvannamiyur Town Panchayat until its absorption in 1978 by the Corporation boundary expansion. While the city's Corporation remains the most empowered, other local bodies in the metropolitan area including the municipalities, town and village panchayats represent weak efforts at local governance.

6.2.1 Parochialising a public space

These initial efforts illustrate the ‘parochial’ nature of this beach as the residents emphasised the difference between ‘their’ beach and the more public beaches like the Marina and Elliot’s Beach.¹⁵⁵ The co-founder of *Beach Buddies* explained the motivation behind their effort:

The *Beach Buddies* which got created three years back, uh, stems from the fact that we are living very close to a stretch of beach which is really beautiful and the fact that it can become, go the Marina or Elliot’s Beach way, we didn’t want to wait till it became a *messy* beach....this [*Beach Buddies*] was formed separately, where it didn’t restrict the members to be only from Valmiki Nagar Fourth Seaward Road. So we had people, of course initially the members were all living here and they were all, each one brought in a skill set of, you know, which could actually, which made this whole group very unique. (emphasis added) (ECR-270304-03)

Other residents also expressed apprehension over ‘their’ beach going the Marina way:

Oh! Thiruvanniyur beach is not comparable [with the Marina]. Marina beach was good at that time [ten years ago]. *Clean beach, was not crowded*. One of the main agendas of coming to Madras was going to the beach. Ok, it will invariably happen every time. Now, I don’t think I have visited Marina very often. It has been too many years, more than a decade. (emphasis added) (ECR-040904-01)

A retired couple who had just moved into the area from Tambaram (an interior suburb of Chennai) described the beach as ‘very nice’, ‘clean’, a blessing for old people: ‘since we didn’t have it there [in Tambaram], this is a real godly offering to us....We never went to a beach when living in Tambaram’. In their perception, Marina ‘for a long time, it has now become too much, that is too much rush’ (ECR-020904-01). In contrast, they felt that Thiruvanniyur beach ‘is in the residential area for the use of the residents’. Another resident said:

¹⁵⁵ Elliot’s Beach is a half Km stretch fronting the southern neighbourhood of Besant Nagar, north of Thiruvanniyur. Its transformation in the last few decades from a ‘parochial’ beach used mostly by the nearby residents to a more ‘public’ beach is notable. With leisure facilities ranging from food outlets to skating rinks, Elliot’s Beach has become a popular destination for the city yuppies. Proposals for its re-imagination abound in plenty from several sources including the Corporation and the residents. This has generated much debate, an analysis of which is outside the remit of this chapter.

..as long as I lived in Besant Nagar, I was going to the beach. That, Elliot's Beach, I was going. Marina, we don't go. After that, this beach, this Thiruvannamiyur Beach.....that is nice. You can very well go there.....Marina beach is now very spoilt, they have made it very bad. It was really nice at one time, in those times, about twenty years ago, before coming to Madras, when we visited it, we went there and it was really good. Now what is happening is the people coming and going, they leave the plates and stuff behind after eating, using it as a toilet, doing so, they have spoilt the Marina beach. (ECR-020904-02)

From the above narratives, cleanliness and crowd emerge as crucial factors differentiating the public and parochial beaches. But there is more to be probed in the semantics of this distinction than what meets the eye. For, inbuilt into their fear of their beach 'going the Marina or Elliot's beach way' is the evident fear of class invasion as the beach became more public. In analysing the changes that beset Coney Island in New York at the beginning of the twentieth century, Zukin et al (1998) show how, as the beach became accessible to a mass public, middle-class residents resisted the muting of class distinctions. The distinctive imaginary of public and parochial spaces is thus something that is subject to and susceptible to the social practices of class. This is seen best in the explicit statement of the following Valmiki Nagar resident who, without mincing words stated that:

My concept has been very very clear. I don't go to any place which the *janata* patronises because you know it doesn't go well with your status and you know my style of living.¹⁵⁶ It is that simple...I try not to patronise any place where the *janata* goes to whether it is a holiday destination or whether it is a, you know, beach like Marina or Besant Nagar. I would go to Besant Nagar but never step into the Marina beach never ever. You know it gives you a very, it is a very sorry sight in that sense you know because of the way people use it. (ECR-250304-02)

The fear of class invasion taking place in Thiruvannamiyur beach was echoed by another resident who remarked on the reduced opportunities of recreation in the neighbourhood:

Of course, we are on the beach and it should be the meeting place and it should be the place where the entire neighbourhood gets together socially, but, um, the beach is hardly usable now. No, it doesn't happen because you know unfortunately there are, it is very hard to say, but socio-economic status plays a big role in things. Whether you want it to

¹⁵⁶ *Janata* literally means the people, but in slang refers to the mass public.

or not it does. So what happens is when people from the surrounding um villages and the surrounding areas, slums or whatever you want to call them, urban settlements, all flock to the beach, because they need a public place too, then the residents of this area will not go, you know, and that is what happened. (ECR-170304-01)

In this regard, the collective activity associated with the safeguarding of the beach reflects the class monopoly that is in-built into this parochialism. It is in this context that Gupta reveals extreme scorn for small associations that are often formed based on interpersonal relations as they are innocent of the notion of the “public” and do not create social trust: ‘In the absence of any awareness of public responsibilities, interpersonal associations are little more than cliques and cabals’ (2001: 213). He is concerned that the low level of institutionalisation characteristic of the umpteen associations in India reveals the poverty of social ethics and an absence of concern with “the other”. It is against this background that the activities of Thiruvannamiyur’s two beach related associations, *Beach Buddies* and East Coast Beach Walkers’ Association (ECBWA) will be examined in the following paragraphs.

6.2.2 *Beach Buddies: ‘We wanted to achieve so much but...’*

An off-shoot of the Valmiki Nagar Fourth Seaward Road Residents’ Association, *Beach Buddies* initially started as an awareness campaign amongst the residents. Its agenda progressed to the physical cleaning of the beach, relying on residents to volunteer for a ‘Sunday morning exercise’. But middle-class residents, after a few weeks of zealous ‘sample participation’ in the beach cleaning exercises, lost enthusiasm for the same. Previous chapter, through the example of *Puduvellam*, revealed that middle-class residents resist ‘dirtying their hands’ when it comes to physical efforts to improve their neighbourhood. They are quite willing to lend themselves to one-day token exercises, when they take up shovels and spades, and sweat it out in the streets and open spaces. Yet, when it comes to a routine exercise, they much rather pay someone else to do the same. Thus, *Beach Buddies* eventually employed a *narikuravar* (gypsy) or a rag-picker for this task, priding itself in sponsoring his livelihood.

But *Beach Buddies* did not have a sustained financial subscription on an annual basis from the residents, and hence struggled to fund itself, relying mostly on donations. It is therefore not surprising that within a few months, its activities slowed down. Handicapped by an unsustainable flow of funds, *Beach Buddies* could not afford the employment of a cleaner, and the beach promptly fell back to its unkempt appearance. In addition to this financial distress, *Beach Buddies* was also hampered by its decision to remain a residents-only initiative.

Lone rangers on the beach

Despite the efforts of its founders to avoid ‘making it a very boring social organisation, you know, talking about, giving a very, what do you call this mourning kind of a feel, this the end of the world appeal’, in spite of doing ‘it in a way which didn’t put anybody down, that you are being ignorant or...you are not caring enough’, and acknowledging that ‘movements like this shouldn’t die because after a point people don’t sustain it’ (ECR-270304-03), those involved with this effort were unable to prevent all this from affecting their organisation:

The sustaining couldn’t happen because again the; suddenly the interest starts getting diluted you know, and that is one thing I realised here. The social, anything to do socially you know unless we are terribly committed to it, it doesn’t last and we move on to other, you know, whatever life and.....our core group started again breaking up because people were just moving away from here. They were all temporary people. (ECR-270304-03)

At the time of interview, *Beach Buddies* had come to a standstill for nearly two years after a year of heightened activities. While its founders were convinced that all was not lost, it is not uncommon to see similar initiatives losing steam and fizzling out in no time. Most efforts are initiated by a select set of socially-minded individuals with a sense of civic awareness and responsibility, involving a few episodes of enthusiastic participation, but which disband soon afterwards (Figure 45). They rarely evolve into permanent organs, as they are

not pinned by institutions that are generally associated with civil society (Chapter Five).

Figure 45: RK Laxman, *The Times of India* on the limited longevity of cleanliness campaigns



Sure, I would love to—for how many days?

Source: Laxman (2004: 154)

The kind of vigilante exceptionalism practiced by *Beach Buddies* captured a very limited audience who eventually tired of the repetitive slogans. While *Beach Buddies* talked about giving space for people to come in and realise their dream of doing something for the community, it was clear that these people were from similar socio-economic background, i.e. the middle class. Insisting on the need for 'like-minded people', *Beach Buddies* activists emphasised their resistance to expanding their social sphere and include other groups, and therefore resisted the institutionalisation of their association:

See, I was very straight about this okay. I knew my limitation. I would, at some point in the future, I would like to take this one [expanding its social sphere] but I am not ready for it. These [the middle-class residents]

are the people I understand. I understand middle class, uh, whatever, you know, the people who live around. If I can make a difference to them; I wasn't looking at making a; I wasn't looking at; those were my circumstance when I typically worked with what I could and I was very clear about that. So I called the kids around my neighbourhood and I called people around my neighbourhood and I worked with them. (ECR-300304-02)

At the same time there is realisation that limiting to members from the same class deprived them of the big picture:

I realised that to do this you need to have a bigger picture you need to do it from a point of understanding it completely with a stronger and more powerful voice. (ECR-300304-02)

Ellickson (1998) has argued that informal social networks can make useful contributions, through collaborations and cooperation exercises, to coterminous institutions pursuing similar objectives at a more socio-political level. But *Beach Buddies* dismissed the possibility of federating with other informal and formal networks involved with the beach. Insisting that its approach was different, its members were sceptical of forming federations or institutionalising themselves:

You know what would happen? The whole place would fall apart. Because these are all; anything that becomes a larger group becomes highly politicised and the feeling of the; I think it is good to be a little fragmented on this because can you imagine then.....I would say that we must be in a minority.....I certainly wouldn't want to institutionalise it. (ECR-300304-02)

Nature on the beach: interacting with fishermen

Part of the reason for their resistance to federating is their unwillingness to involve the fishermen from the nearby *kuppam* in their efforts. This comes as a surprise given the clear 'preserve the nature' steer of their activities:

When we came up with the concept of *Beach Buddies*, it wasn't, not so much about the beach, but, it, it is something pure nature at your doorstep.....our entire communication was meant to be about nature, meant to be about your natural environment, oh, and not just the natural environment, per se, your responsibility to your environment....you know the fact that the ocean needs to be protected and fish needs protecting. You cannot pollute and stuff like that. We were constantly trying to sensitise people. (ECR-270304-03)

They even attempted to tie the whole issue of keeping the beach clean with other 'external' environmental issues including water conservation and tree plantation. But they did not see the fishermen as an inherent part of this 'natural environment'.

While *Beach Buddies* acknowledged that fishermen are 'more in touch with nature than anybody else' (ECR-300304-02), they dismissed the possibility of collaboration between the two groups on the insistence that 'you need to have a different set of sensibilities' (ECR-270304-03). They reasoned that 'their' beach stretch was an empty one, outside the fishermen's territories, and emphasised that they 'actually stayed clear from the *kuppam* beach' (ECR-270304-03). In fact, they were anxious to avoid potential conflicts with other users of the beach, particularly the fishermen, and the best way, according to them, was to stay clear. But while they were cautious about not interfering with the fishermen's use of the beach, there were instances when they couldn't help passing judgement on the way fishermen used the beach. This particularly became evident when the conversation veered towards the use of the beachfront as an open toilet. In this aspect they opined that 'the fishermen don't use the beach right' (ECR-270304-03). There is thus a fundamental contradiction in their commentary on the fishermen:

...they [the fishermen] have been, in fact, this is, we have encroached upon their area as we say and they have their own systems in place for a long period of time. The only thing which we wanted to bring across to them is while this place is yours, we would like you to stay you know along the times, that too, and change your lifestyle to the extent that this place can be used by everyone. Uh, the beach is as much yours as ours and we are not, we are not claiming you know the use of the land but uh there are better ways of changing your, your know, change your lifestyle, upgrade your lifestyle. They have this strong belief that nature has provided them with this open place for them to use and the sea washes away all the muck and they don't realise the muck also comes back. Whatever is just thrown in filters out which is not part of the beach, of the sea. But they say that we have always been like this and we have never had a problem. (ECR-270304-03)

Even though they talked about ‘educating’ the fishermen against these habits, and working with NGOs and the Corporation to build toilets for their use, it came to nothing. As a result of their muddled stand on the fishermen, they simply could not send any social message across. This precluded the possibility of a politics of partnership, even though they admitted that as a lone entity they couldn’t go far with their efforts.

Isolated as a group, *Beach Buddies* developed a fundamental distrust of ‘others’ on the beach. Thus, when the garbage bins they had placed in the beach disappeared, they pointed to a vague set of others: ‘there used to be all these people on the beach; it is nice to roll it [bins] around’, and evasively said that it could have been ‘the young boys from the nearby areas who come to play cricket on the beach’, or ‘the fishermen who think that it could be used to store water’, or in general some ‘anti-social elements’ (ECR-270304-03).

Their reluctance to partner was not just with the fishermen but also with the Corporation. But in this instance, they blamed the Corporation for not showing interest in their activities:

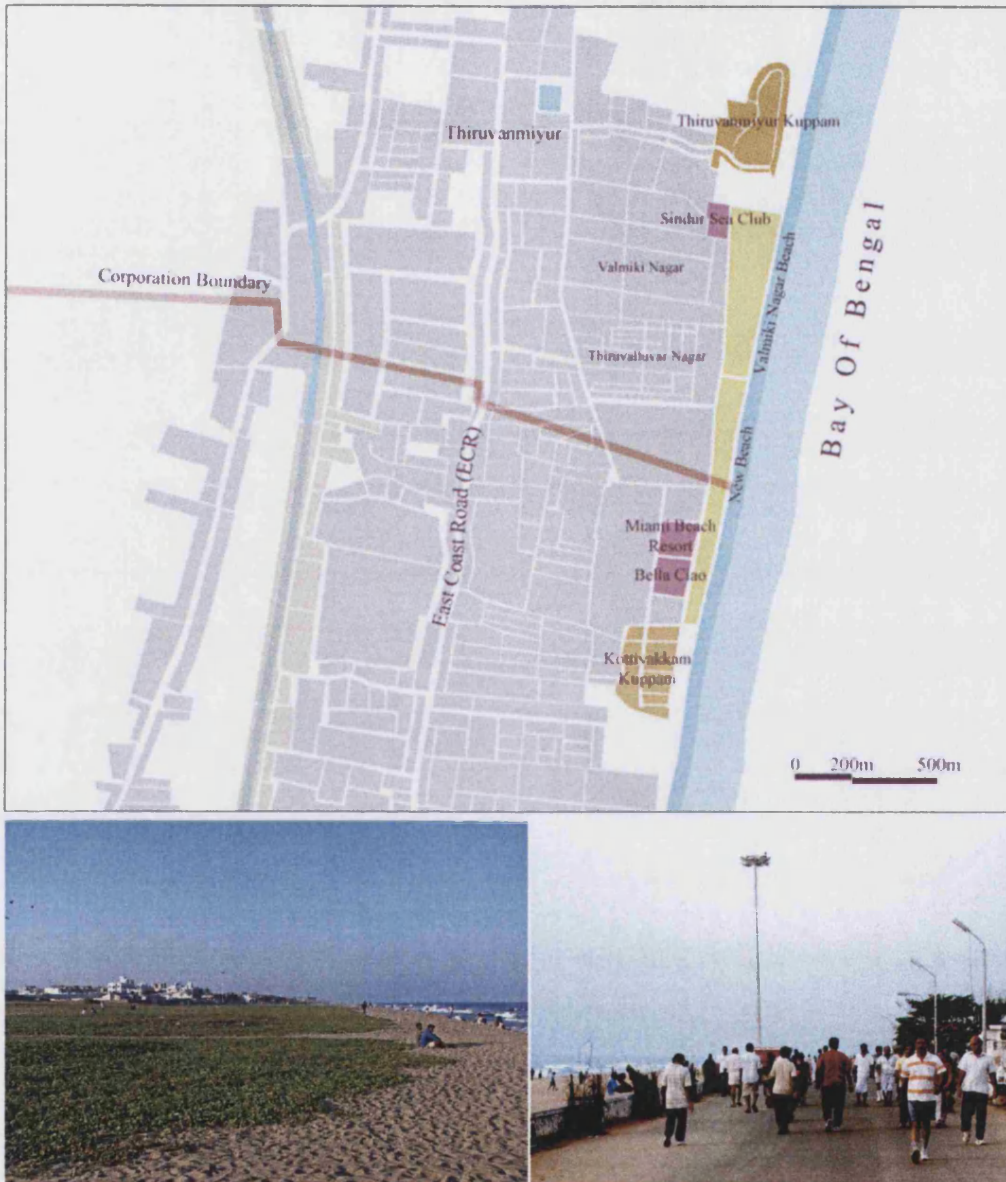
Surprisingly, Corporation refused to have, like when we approached them and said see we have; the Corporation, has, um, um, goes ahead cleaning the, you know, urban areas with garbage, why don’t you send the people to clean the beach?.....They said, we are, our limits are up to this, up to whatever road is defined.....we were really shocked at the attitude the Corporation had. We had spoken to the Councillor, more to the AE [Assistant Engineer] of this area. They said no, we don’t have that whatever infrastructure or the manpower to assign people to go and clean the beach. (ECR-270304-03)

Their approach reflects more the attitude of residents who demand to be serviced, rather than as public partners willing to share some of the responsibilities of an already overstretched public body. But they didn’t seem to rue about this so much, placing their objectives with the middle-class residents who in their opinion were the ‘biggest users and because they were the biggest enjoyers of the spaces of the beach and they took the most interest.....I do think that it works best with people within proximity of the beach’ (ECR-300304-02).

In their inactive state today, *Beach Buddies* activists seem content to be a 'remembered lot', waiting for the 'right kind of people' (read as middle-class residents) to come along and take up the initiative again: 'If you notice, all beach areas are handled by organisations like these, you know, defence of the beach is all by the [middle class] people' (ECR-270304-03). And it is probably true of the southern beaches. But what they don't realise is the varying range of such efforts from inter-personal associations to organised institutions. The former is eventually bound to fail as their momentum dies, and it is only the latter, through institutionalisation, that has better chances of survival and success.

It is to illustrate this point that the next section will focus on the efforts of another group of residents living along the Thiruvannamiyur shoreline (not just Valmiki Nagar but also other nearby neighbourhoods) who have successfully gathered together to develop the beachfront. Centred mainly around the middle-class habit of 'beach walking', the East Coast Beach Walkers Association (ECBWA) has taken up the development of a one Km beach stretch, immediately south of Valmiki Nagar, popularly referred to as New Beach (Figure 46). While *Beach Buddies* opted out of a politics of partnership, ECBWA has harnessed this well, successfully achieving more than *Beach Buddies*. But their politics of partnership has involved an alignment of purely middle-class interests with the state, to the exclusion of other social groups.

Figure 46: Beaches of Thiruvanniyur – Valmiki Nagar and New Beach



Valmiki Nagar Beach

New Beach

Today, with the dormancy of Beach Buddies, Valmiki Nagar beach portrays an overgrown, 'uncared' for look, while nearby New Beach has developed into an enviable stretch for beach walkers, mainly through the efforts of ECBWA.

6.2.3 East Coast Beach Walkers Association: consuming the beach

Amongst the numerous traits and habits that the Indian bourgeoisie inherited from the colonial British, a popular one is the habit of promenading on the beach. In Chennai, one cannot miss the hoard of middle-aged middle-class citizens taking a leisurely early morning stroll along the various beach stretches

in the city, be it the Marina, Elliot's Beach or the Thiruvanmiyur beach. For many of the middle-class residents this has become a status signifier of sorts as they socialise during these walks. So much so that a 'wave of enterprise' has begun to emerge around these beach walkers, or what a recent article in *The Hindu* referred to as the 'dawn brigade'. Temporary stalls selling herbal drinks, ready-to-eat healthy meals, magazines and newspapers, and some even offering health tips dot the shoreline, eager to capture the middle-class market.¹⁵⁷

Long-term residents of Valmiki Nagar pride themselves in being the earliest beach walkers in the area:

Now the beach (laughs), I have been walking along the beach for the last many many years. I used to walk when I worked here in Madras [1960s and 1970s]. Then I went out of Madras. I came back and settled here in 1987, when I retired from service. And for the last seventeen years, I have been walking here everyday. During the first ten of those seventeen years.....I used to walk everyday. So we are amongst the earliest walkers. If I may say so, most of them who are walking now are newcomers. (ECR-150304-01)

The above resident was eager to differentiate himself from the current breed of beach walkers who are not only relatively new to the area but have also organised themselves to form an East Coast Beach Walkers Association (ECBWA) to ensure certain transformations in the beach. The previous chapter remarked on how the new middle-class residents in the city wish to utilise the collective bargaining of the residents' associations to highlight their position as citizen-consumers. And much of the ECBWA's agenda pursues a similar strategy, as it is a collective organisation to fulfil the consumption needs of the beach walkers.

Reflecting on the failure of the *Beach Buddies* initiative, one of the residents described them as social reformers who were unable to achieve the kind of physical transformation they had hoped for:

¹⁵⁷ Padmanabhan, G. (2005, 09 May). Waves of enterprise. *The Hindu*, p. Metro Plus 5.

It started so well, I mean, you know. I thought it was an excellent scheme, get the kids involved, you know, make the environment aware, keep the beach clean. It was wonderful but somehow you know in India, I don't know, numbers, just numbers, sheer numbers and sheer demand of services just defeats, you know.(ECR-170304-01)

And it was exactly this, the advantage of numbers that the ECBWA employed to enforce its vision of the beach. In existence since the mid-1990s, the Vice-President of the association explained its origins:

Before 1995, it was an ordinary mud road. Here, for near about 100-200 people were walking, coming here for walking. So we needed to provide them with conveniences, secondly this area needs to be established properly. So we formed an association.....As friends if we joined together to form an association, then whenever we want we can approach, otherwise we cannot develop this. With this intention, we formed this association.....At that time, in that period the Corporation Mayor was Mr. Stalin (1996-2001). In this period, we approached him like if you develop this road, so many people walk on this road, in future, more in thousands will benefit from it....every age group will benefit from it because there are people coming in the morning and evening. Saying so, we approached him first. When we first approached him, this road was near about one Km end to end one Km. If you see in that, one half is Corporation, other half is Panchayat [Kottivakkam Town Panchayat], panchayat area.¹⁵⁸ So even if we approached one to gain benefits for one, the other is affected. That's why, only if we make our association strong, so we are only respected. If the request comes from our association, they will do things for us. We all decided it should be so. So association needs to be strengthened. We approached the walkers to become members. Only then for these developments we can ask others and if they are going to meet it then they will give us something confirmed otherwise if we individually as ten and twenty people ask they will be indifferent. Today, politically if you see they look for voting banking. If the government does one thing, the kind of benefits they expect from that is voting but if beyond all that if they do something for us, it is because only if so many of us approach, then only we get something.....year by year we strengthened the association. After strengthening, about 100, then 200, then 300, now near about above 500 members are there in the association now. (ECR-040404-01)

Through its collective bargaining with the Corporation, a Member of the Parliament (who lives nearby), and a Member of the Legislative Assembly, they have been able to build a neatly laid out tar-topped road, with a separate paved area for the walkers, benches for seating, street lighting, an all night

¹⁵⁸ Thiruvanmiyur is the last ward in the Corporation of Chennai, after which in the south, begins the Kottivakkam Town Panchayat.

high-mast light, and a police community booth, amongst other things (Figure 47). In procuring these facilities it is evident that the ECBWA has understood well not only the ‘numbers game’ but also the advantages that can be had from the politics of partnership.

Figure 47: Improvements through ECBWA



Clockwise from top left: Community police booth in the background, high-mast night lighting, provision of drinking water, and bus shelters

A ‘popular’ partnership

While both *Beach Buddies* and ECBWA focus primarily on middle-class demands, ECBWA were able to establish a rapport with the Corporation and the politicians based on its collective strength. Whereas, in the case of the *Beach Buddies*, when they asked the Corporation ‘to do their duty and clean

the beach', in the absence of a larger collective support, the Corporation easily dismissed their demand as one coming from a one-off 'irritating fellow'.¹⁵⁹ Both organisations also relied on social events and gatherings for dissemination. But, if the *Beach Buddies* relied on a residents' exclusive jumble sale and kid's bazaar confined to the four streets in the neighbourhood, the kind of activities that ECBWA organised are on a more popular level, involving a larger group of associations and civic institutions:

...here there is a residents' association, Thiruvalluvar Nagar Residents' Association. They also got involved with us, joined us...Also now, Lions Club here has been launched. Lions Club of Elliot's Darshan, in that name, they are servicing here. Example, if you see 'Breezy Beach', they have formed a group of ten clubs or so. If you see, every year we celebrate either Independence Day or Republic Day grandly here through association. Then, three months once we have a free health camp. Then, like that, they also do volunteer service, the lion's club, they volunteer for health camp, they have done a lot like that. (ECR-040404-01)

Patriotic celebrations often get noticed by political parties, as political leaders are invited as chief guests who are then obliged to at least hear out their demands, if not fulfil them. Health camps smack of philanthropic intentions, endorsed by a wider circle of people. On the other hand, the kind of chief guests invited to the *Beach Buddies* events included specialists like environmentalists talking (most definitely in English) about nature conservation.

Remarking on the preoccupation of shoreline residents with beach development issues, Theodore Baskaran, a well-known naturalist/historian and a resident of Thiruvannamiyur criticised this middle-class sense of resident environmentalism:

Now I was involved in the beach and went for the meeting. They called that 'save the beach' meeting. And some concerned went. And then I raised the point that what, that if we want to do anything with the beach, we should interact with the people who are in the beach, that's the *kuppam* people. And to deal with the *kuppam* people you have to have

¹⁵⁹ In India, whenever someone steps into any government department office, with a complaint letter or request for intervention, the officials will generally adopt a lax attitude, saying, 'leave it in writing, and we will take a look at it'. When the plaintiff insists on 'immediate action', the officials will often get annoyed at the persistence, saying, 'Ugh! What an irritating fellow'.

your name whatever organisations you are finding, you have to have your name in Tamil. If you put a 'save the beach' association, what will they understand? You immediately alienate them by giving an English title.....I only raise the Tamil issue because you have to. As it is they think environmental movement is a preoccupation of the elite and English-speaking wallahs. Like that you are creating distance.....all these groups are very elitist and all these groups are very removed from the *kuppam* people. That is very harmful for conservation movement. You know, because the, those people see that any activity relating to the environment is anti-people. In fact that is how it is perceived. So I think they have to, they have to keep carrying them [the *kuppam* people] along with the whole movement. They are not doing that. Simply they keep talking in English. (TB-090404-03)

In this sense, both *Beach Buddies* and ECBWA are equally exclusive.

'Dealing' with fishermen: 'They are not in the picture..'

Confined by its middle-class needs, ECBWA, like *Beach Buddies*, is reluctant to include the nearby fishermen *kuppams* in their efforts. In the first instance, the association viewed the *kuppam* as potentially opposing the scheme:

....there was some opposition to this gesture. Because this was a bit 'fisheries' area. Because this was a fishermen *kuppam*, walking could be a disturbance to them, they thought. (ECR-040404-01)

In fact, just like *Beach Buddies*, ECBWA too asserted that its interventions were taking place in a stretch where there is no fishermen presence or usage:

Here, the fishermen, in this one Km area, they are not disturbed. For them, there is no trouble from this. There is an area taken up exclusively for them, allocated like that, north and south for them. The big benefit for us is that this one Km was without any disturbance from them and we were able to service to this extent otherwise there would have been problems between us and them. (ECR-040404-01)

The ECBWA official clarified further:

No, in our association, no one [from the fishermen *kuppam*] has approached us and said, why have you done like this, there is so much trouble for us. We haven't either gone to them and asked for anything. Because they don't live for us and we don't live for them. In between, that hasn't been there. So far there hasn't been anything from them. (ECR-040404-01)

There is an underlying perception of threat from the fishermen to the middle-class use of the beach in this insistence of spatially distinct territories. Seen in this context, even proposals like levelling the sand dune and installing more seating facilities closer to the water suggest an ulterior motive on behalf of ECBWA:

....occasionally they [fishermen] come here but regularly they don't come here. Permanent area [of the fishermen] is there beyond that area. Somebody once might come and spread their nets but they will remove it immediately. Because the peoples are there, that's why we have asked for levelling. If we level it and put another post, public will sit covering the full stretch. If they sit, they [the fishermen] will feel delicate about coming into this area and will make way for us. (ECR-040404-01)

It seems that these organisations' (Beach Buddies and ECBWA) view of a compartmentalised beach catering to different user groups is underwritten by a nervous anticipation of conflict if users spatially overlap.¹⁶⁰ There is a tendency of a middle-class extension of power relations present in the more permanent forms of urban landscape to the beach as a public space. This comes out in the approach of ECBWA which is socially restricted in its politics of partnership with the fishermen and also in terms of its interventions on the beach.

Narrowed by residents' interests

A member of ECBWA explained their resistance to institutionalised social mixing:

See this area consists of three types of society, lower, middle and upper classes. In all these different walks of life the lifestyles are different...if you are in the lower strata, he will have his own economic considerations for it. Middle class, he has some educational constraints for him, upper class his own business constraints for him. So what they all do, they cannot have a common hold. To come to a common hold, everybody has to sacrifice and compromise so many issues which is not happening away. Now at this stage when we come here, we are all already middle-class people. Basically, by and large, people who use the beach are

¹⁶⁰ In a study of class relations in the beaches of Rio de Janeiro, Freeman (2002) counters the popular portrayal of the beach as a space where a diversity of beach goers share the same sand, and argues that the beach is not an undifferentiated mass of people distributed randomly along the beach. Instead, a sophisticated understanding of the landscape prevails through a spatio-temporal distinction as a result of which the beach, in a highly stratified manner, is marked by hegemonic tendencies.

middle-class people, who are here at this gathering are middle-class society.....So we want to have in our own fashion certain type of life. Here, to have a common platform is very very difficult. Because of economics, number one, second is educational background. Third is intellectual competency also will come into work.....there are differences in our lifestyles and probably in our attitudes, in our principles or approach or perceptions and all. It is bound to be there. It is already there. So we cannot go and just mix with x or y. (ECR-010404-03)

ECBWA's middle-class members are convinced like *Beach Buddies* that no one uses the beach more than themselves, and insist that it is their interest that is intertwined most with the beach. They acknowledge that the beach is used by other social classes. But according to them, the poor and lower classes who probably come once in a week 'to have a break' from the struggles of their daily life, and the upper classes who generally depend on enclosed exclusive clubs for recreation, could not possibly have as much to do with the beach as the middle class do.

Spatially, ECBWA covers a very small area where its interventions remain limited to the foreshore, by the roadside. While it has indicated a desire to extend further into the sands, it is unwilling to think about beach development issues at large:

See, our service is all along the roadside only. Because suppose any, if we collectively through sponsorship achieve something then when the government takes some action in the future it may get demolished. That this shouldn't happen, we are concentrating only on the roadside.....Our developments are all along the roadside. It is just cleaning and levelling that we have asked help for. So in this area, we don't want to do anything big collectively or through sponsorship.....What we can do maximum, there is a limit to it. Beyond that whatever it is we need to get permission from government. Any provision in this area, first we give the letters to the Panchayat or Corporation. We individually cannot take any action. Association is there. But the road belongs to the government. Beach is government. Even if we put a light here or do some social service here or even if we put up a board or even if we put these benches here, even for these we need to give letters through the association. We get permission from them and then only do things. Because tomorrow disturbance, the question of whom did you ask before you placed these shouldn't arise. So even now in this Corporation area we have arranged for about six benches for that also we gave letters. (ECR-040404-01)

In addition to this cumbersome process of getting the approval from officials for every little effort of theirs, there are a couple of reasons as to why they are unwilling to take the success of their exercise to a larger scale. First of all, ECBWA is really an extended activity of the nearby residents' associations (Valmiki Nagar and Thiruvalluvar Nagar), albeit one more successful than the *Beach Buddies*. The fact that it operate like a residents' association has much to do with the residents' desire to operate on a small scale and remain that way:

Us, we function like for this residential area only. This ECBWA extends only for Thiruvalluvar Nagar. If you look at its address, it reads as Thiruvanniyur Thiruvalluvar Nagar ECBWA. So, in this area, what developments we can do we do. If you look at residents' associations they will do work only in their residential area. They don't go outside.....So this is Thiruvanniyur Thiruvalluvar Nagar walkers' association only...if you take this association, the members are from here maximum. Residential area members are our members. (ECR-040404-01)

When posed with the question of potentially federating with similar beach initiatives of residents living in other neighbourhoods along the East Coast Road, the ECBWA official maintained that they are not against federations but if 'we take care of our area, they take care of theirs, then it is okay' (ECR-040404-01). He considered the activities of his association as a public service, one that is an exemplar for replication elsewhere. He also insisted that there is no issue of keeping the gains of their efforts to themselves, and disagreed with the suggestion that the association was not willing to share its 'fruits' with others.

In this context, it is obvious that the association's 'partnering' with the state is a careful exercise, with a limited agenda, and amidst conviction that larger beach development issues have to be addressed and monitored by the state officials:

For this, the government should take action...government gives the permission [for developments]. Actually if you see, in the sea shore area everyone says building construction for 500 metres there shouldn't be any construction. Now all this (points around) is built unapproved. Who gives permission? The government. If the government doesn't do anything about it, we cannot do much about it. Because the public needs to adjust to it. They [the government] should become aware of the fact that they are behaving against rules and regulations. They don't get it

either. If they have built so much, so many buildings, what can we do about it? (ECR-040404-01)

Not only do they think that overall it is the government's responsibility, they also endorse the recent efforts of the state. Thus, the association, contrary to the various middle-class civil society protests against the MoU with the Malaysian Government for the Marina Development Plan, supports these very efforts. To the extent that the fishermen communities on the Marina are blamed for disrupting the project:

...there is a government project itself that is Marina to Neelangarai, there is a beautification project, collaboration with the Malaysian government. For that itself they are not making way.....If you see foreshore estate, Pattinapakkam [fishermen neighbourhoods along Santhome Beach], see that one area. There is a bypass road, the use of this bypass road was to be used if there is a road disturbance. But now you cannot go near that road area. To that level they [fishermen] have destroyed it. Now the reason for that is it is their residential area their living condition will remain like that. People tried to reform them and it hasn't been possible. In the Marina to Neelangarai project that is the first one to be affected. But they refused to vacate it. So the project is stalled. Because throughout the world, what now is second should be made first, that was the idea.¹⁶¹ The government's voluntary service due to the Malaysian government that has been stopped. What they [the fishermen] did was disturbance. (ECR-040404-01)

6.2.4 Masked by development

Overall, the ECBWA has emerged as a popular body known for successfully enforcing order on the beach. Besides arranging with Onyx and the Corporation to have the beachside cleaned daily, ECBWA consults with relevant state officials on a recurring basis over several development concerns:

So any fault, any mistake, anything, we report to the Corporation immediately through the association...They will immediately attend to it and clear it for us. Like that, security, when you look at the police patrols in the night hours, throughout the night they cover it....because we gave letter to the police department, like in the evening time...when you come and see after sunset up to twelve 'o' clock people keep going here and there. So they need security. We asked for police protection and their patrol vehicle parades this place up to morning through out night they cover and go in the morning. There is a police community booth. That

¹⁶¹ He was referring to the commonly posed question: Marina is the second longest beach in the world, but why can't it be the world's best beach?

facility is here. So there is no fear for those who park here.....they give protection to ensure that there is no disturbance. Sometimes, this vehicular parking is some disturbance, they are told then. If they are regular visitors they know the rules and regulations to follow. (ECR-040404-01)

Today, New Beach projects a bourgeois imagery which is the envy of other beachside residential neighbourhoods:

...you see this, what is this hamlet just before, they have now done a nice walk path, uh, Thiruvanniyur.....See, they have done a very nice promenade okay, a beautiful promenade okay. You have two Km, three Km, everyday in the morning people go down and walk there. We wanted you know, we wanted to build a small promenade kind of thing....so that you know old people can come and sit in the evening there, and then you have children on these swings and see-saws and you those stuff. That is what I thought that we should do here. (ECR-270304-01)

But it is not just the middle-class seaside residential neighbourhoods that aspire for such improvements. Even the fishermen living in the nearby *kuppams* think positively of these 'improvements'. Fishermen in Thiruvanniyur *kuppam* said that despite the fact that beach beautification exercises reflect the claims of other social classes (mostly middle and upper classes) to the beach, they do accept it as a principle and welcome it as a strategy. Specifically responding to the development of New Beach, the head of the fishermen community in Thiruvanniyur *kuppam* said:

We welcome all those changes. We shouldn't resist or oppose that. To a certain extent we endorse them...we have been living like this without any developments. We hope that by at least looking at these improvements, our people should have some awareness and aspirations...They put a road for walking, then they put a platform for sitting, then they put a car parking. Now in the city area, there is prone to be development like that. (ECR-090404-01)

There is clearly a rational-utilitarian aspect to their position that cannot be ignored. Engulfed by rapid urbanisation, fishermen *kuppams*, particularly those along the southern beaches, find themselves in close proximity to the new residential communities, exposed to their 'modern lifestyles'. They view it advantageously as they reap some of the benefits including electricity connections, modern appliances in the household and private vehicles for

transportation. Also, fishermen residing along the southern stretch are also artisanal fishermen like the one along the Marina, and whose livelihood opportunities through fishing has reduced drastically over the years. This has had a spatial impact on fishermen's use of their immediate environment, as their activities on the beach have shrunk. One can notice the reduced number of catamarans, and the limited drying of nets and fish on the beach:

Now, there isn't the situation for it [drying] because there isn't the catch. Only if there is catch then we will know the kind of situation it creates [on the beach]. That is why it hasn't formed into a conflict nor has there been opposition to it [from other social groups]....the profession of fishing is not like in old days. Fish is not available like in old times. Fish growth is low...For example the season now is for the big nets. Yearly for three months, only for three months we use that. In recent times, it hasn't happened so they don't know about it. For those who visit the beach it seems as if we don't use it anymore...If we can get that type of fish, we will use these nets. Now because that type of fish is reduced we don't use it....That is why the beach walkers don't see us so much on the beach. Now for 2-3 or even 5 years if you take, because the fish catch is low, we don't use those nets. Maybe when we start using that we will be seen. (ECR090404-04)

The social repercussions are equally poignant. Of the 600 families living in the Thirvanmiyur *kuppam*, about 460 practice fishing. But in the absence of fulltime fishing opportunities, many men are taking up alternative jobs, such as night-time watchmen and security guards in the surrounding middle and upper class neighbourhoods. While the fishermen insist that this is temporary, and that 'how much ever one goes out [of the community], we need to go fishing in the end, there is no way out' (ECR-090404-02), this current scenario is creating a client-patron relationship between the *kuppam* and the middle-class residential neighbourhoods. While it is not acknowledged openly, a dependency pattern is forming as a result of which middle-class residents are unwilling to recognise the fishermen as partners in the beach development exercise. While the middle-class residents suggest that they prefer to avoid the fishermen fearing conflict, fishermen suspect that they are held in contempt:

They [the middle class] think of us only as untouchables. They think of us as second-class citizens and they don't include us in any of their venture. Only when elections happen, people approach for votes. Otherwise we are left on our own. No one comes and asks us for anything, saying, we have started an association, tell us your complaints,

we will tell you ours. They don't do that. If you say *kuppam*, they have a certain condescendence and the arrogance of the educated. They have created a situation where we are relegated to second-tier living. (ECR-090404-01)

At the same time they are aware that they are the 'usual suspects' when any thing goes wrong on the beach, and hence support some of the beach improvements such as installation of artificial lighting. At a time when environmentalists are crying hoarse over the all-night high-powered high-mast disturbing the night-time ecology of the sea, it is interesting to see fishermen support for the same.¹⁶² They have their own reasons for doing so:

The reason why we welcome the lighting is that there is often some form of offence or the other taking place. There is a general incrimination of the fishermen and the people from the *kuppam*. We are accused. People go to the beach, stay until say 7pm in the evening. There are some thefts happening there. We don't want to be considered as an accomplice to that. So we welcome the lighting. It is not only for surveillance but also because in the darkness when you can't see the person they easily point the fingers at the fishermen....we feel that the absence of proper lighting in the beach area is a problem for that. When we go fishing the lighting doesn't affect us. In fact when we come back in the dark we can see the light. (ECR-090404-01)

This line of argument is contrary to the one toed by 'pro-environment groups' like the *Beach Buddies* which had expressed 'great reservations' about the installation of lights and paving on the beach:

We felt that the moment that [lighting and paving] happens.....we know that it [the beach] is gone. It has become commercial, you will have hawkers coming in, you will have people coming in to spend more time on the beach which means more late night and lights will make it even more easy for them to hang out which means anti-social elements and during the nesting season the turtles [the olive ridleys] will have a problem because they will see the light towards the beach and they will all get disoriented. That was our greatest concern. (ECR-300304-01)

When fishermen were queried about whether they shared the concerns of the environmentalist regarding the protection of the sea turtles, they replied that 'we are not affected or concerned by the turtles. That is the area of the wildlife

¹⁶² The most prominent issue in recent times is the way intense urbanisation along the coast has affected the hatching pattern of the Olive Ridley sea turtles. They are supposed to follow the movement of the moonlight, but are disoriented by the presence of these artificial lights.

department. Once upon a time, maybe it [the turtles and their protection] was important [for us] but now with time it isn't.....we take care so that they don't get trapped in our boats, that's all'. With environmental issues taken up by residents of the seaside neighbourhoods who are unwilling to partner with the fishermen, an environmentalist-fishermen nexus, established successfully in the Marina, has become impossible on the southern stretches. Most residents wish to stay out of the fishermen's way, but to a large extent carry a negative opinion of them. Pursued in isolation, environment becomes an 'elite concern'. The fishermen, though aware of being considered a culturally inferior social group, focus attention on their socio-economic demands and consequently have little time for environmental issues. Desirous of benefiting from the larger gains of development, fishermen communities such as Thiruvannamiyur *kuppam* located in densely urbanised areas resonate more with the beach beautification exercises and indicate little support for environmental voices against such moves.

The practice of ordering the beach as pursued by the bourgeois residents, and as detailed above, shows it to be predominantly exclusive to middle-class desires. Amidst highly localised interests and concerns, the opportunities for a formidable formation of the politics of partnership have been limited, driven mainly by self-interest. It is also notable that this ordering of the public space has been accompanied by a parallel process of othering, one that justifies their exclusionary traits and disciplinary tactics, and in general is steeped in inculcation of the other. The practice of ordering and the process of othering are virtually two sides of the same coin, reinforcing each other. They underline the creation and reproduction of a master narrative, where the 'other' is simultaneously erected and rejected by ordering.

6.3 Ordering through othering

Public spaces rather than serving as the spaces of democracy often become the ideological terrain for a dominant social group, which captures these spaces to render certain values as commonsense. A process of discursive naturalisation

and normalisation of the social hierarchy is automatic to this appropriation, one that is practically applied through the practice of ordering and the process of othering. But the translation of dominant ideologies is not necessarily unchallenged. At one hand, the presence of different social groups and their interplay at various levels creates a field where meanings are more complex than a simple twofold division of right and wrong. In this context, alliances can only be superficially produced, as illustrated through the politics of partnership in the Chennai beaches. Secondly, the circumscription of the bourgeois ideology on the public spaces is limited because of the ambivalent nature of representing the self in the public. Bauman (1998) argues that any form of engagement with the whole self takes place only inside at home, and the self in the public is reduced to a surface. One is prompted to look no further than the surface of others in the public sphere, as a result of which it comes across as a morally limiting act. This weakened assertion of the self in the public results in a simultaneously diluted understanding of the other.

In this chapter, previous sections explored the practices of the state and middle-class groups in ordering the beach. Accompanying this is the process of identifying the incommpliant others, one that involves an emphasis of social class distinctions based on the uneven material conditions of everyday life. Unsurprisingly, given the bourgeois ideology of the discourse, it is the poor and the lower classes who are portrayed as the deviant category. But, as the introduction to this chapter highlighted, according to some middle-class members (including Naipaul), there is no class difference between the line of pissers on the street who can equally be from the middle or lower class. Yet, neo-liberalisation seems to have given the middle-class authority and responsibility of restoring public spaces to a sense of decorum and propriety. For the middle class to assume the vanguard position in this process of reclamation, it is crucial for them to extricate themselves from complicity as defilers of public spaces. To this extent the process of othering becomes even more crucial. But as the following accounts illustrate, othering of culprits is not a simple and straightforward process of differentiation between the 'proper'

self and the aberrant other. Rather, the more they try to exculpate themselves, the more implicated they are in the 'other'.

6.3.1 Dirt and danger on the beach

In July 2002, a high-profile advertisement appeared in *The Hindu* under the title of *Favourite Beach Pastimes*. Idyllic images of beaches around the world complete with beach umbrellas and people lounging in their bathing suits were juxtaposed with an image of the Marina which showed early morning squatters defecating in the open. The text below the images mentioned that '[i]nstead of being the second longest beach in the world, the Marina can today claim to be the second longest public toilet in the world', and it went on to make a call to the readers to help stop 'this steady degradation of the beach'. Appearing in an English daily commanding primarily a middle-class readership, the advertisement appealed immediately to their bourgeois sentiments. It announced an initiative *Marinavai Maathalam Vaa* (Come, let us change the Marina), launched by Citizens Rights Action Group (CRAG), a conglomeration of bourgeois interests. The head of this organisation is a convenor for the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII), and its membership and sponsorship was drawn from the different corporate houses, multinational companies, prominent residents and non-resident Indians, and many middle-class professionals working in various globalised sectors in the city.¹⁶³ Even though, as its campaign progressed it claimed to take a more comprehensive view of the problem of dirt on the beach, including plastics, paper, bottles and other waste materials (bye-products of middle-class consumption), the fact remains that the initial image of squatters on the beach using it as an open-toilet was the attention grabbing one, striking a chord with middle-class sensibilities.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ CRAG was formed in 2002 by a group of professionals and registered as a trust to work for the protection of the rights and enhancement of the quality of life of Chennaites.

¹⁶⁴ The evolution of CRAG's activities was profiled regularly in the Metro Section of The Hindu between May and November 2002 (27 May; 05 August; 03 September; 26 September; 17 October; 25 October and 06 November).

The nuisance of defecation

Even though it is debatable as to who uses the beach as an open-toilet, in the minds of many middle-class members there is no doubt that it is clearly the fishermen who are the 'defilers' of beach through their 'natural habits'. First of all, almost all middle and upper class residents of seaside neighbourhoods along ECR identify defecation as a major problem. Some residents described the beach as a 'shitting strip' (ECR-040904-03), and for others, 'I guess I would want the beach to be more public oriented but not public oriented to the extent that a person uses it as his own personal urinal or whatever' (ECR-210304-02). In many neighbourhoods along the ECR, beach issues have revolved specifically around the issue of defecation on the beach. Promptly associating it with the fishermen, one resident moaned the inability of people to 'come and enjoy a clean beach bereft of the fishermen's colony and various other nuisances', and stressed the need 'to reach out to them [fishermen] and say that they should not use the beachfront for defecation' (ECR-310304-02).

There is a discernible intolerance towards this issue, as a resident insisted that 'they [fishermen] just not use but abuse the beach. Because you can see in the morning, especially in the morning, it is very lousy. They want to abuse the beach' (ECR0-40904-01). Some middle-class residents frame the issue in terms of cultural resistance from the fishermen. Reading a spatial determinism in this expression of a specific socio-cultural trait, one resident commented that:

I think ideologically the fishermen who always reside on the beachside all over the country they all feel that that is their homeland and the sea is their god, the sea brings food...So defecating in front of the sea and its things washed away into the sea is something which they feel as a cultural integration amongst themselves.....See in Bombay, if you go to say Mahalaxmi, if you go to Worli, there are all fishing communities there, but what has happened over time is that fishing communities is still there, the development has come, that is separate so you don't really see them, but they continue to go fishing and come back, dry their fish and they don't want to get integrated in all this. So the government, people also don't interfere with them. See, they have their own slums there. They want to live in slums. They don't want to live in houses like this. So they don't want to go and use a toilet. They want to defecate on the sand, on the seashore. So you don't change my habit, sorry. (ECR-270304-01)

But interviews with the residents of the fishermen *kuppam* reveal that they are equally uncomfortable with the issue of open-air defecation, identifying it as a problem that needs to be addressed and resolved:

It is a question of awareness, we need to change that slowly. Because as times change, we should change also. We definitely need to change. In that sense, we don't like using the beach as open-air toilet. That needs to be changed slowly....We need awareness for that. (ECR-090404-01)

Really you have to expose this point. It will be very good if you do so. Women are in plenty but they all live in the huts. They have a big problem attending to nature's calls. In the beginning when there were no movement of people, and this whole area used to be deserted, one side in the open area was used by men and the other side by women. Now if you go there it is totally populated. Where ever you go, people are moving about. We don't like to use it as a toilet when we are looked at by others, and if we do so it is only because we have no choice. We do want an enclosed toilet rather than going in the open. (ECR-200304-02)

Middle-class residents though fail to be reassured by such acknowledgements, insisting that these are insincere statements merely to pacify middle-class anger: 'this is all humbug. They have televisions in their huts, they use motorised boats for fishing, they have all kinds of modern facilities but they are not willing to construct a toilet. Why do they wait for the government to come and build them some? And even when you build them some, they never use it' (ECR-010404-04). In making such a comment, they fail to realise that while it is much cheaper to buy a television or other commodity goods, building a toilet is an infrastructure concern that is much more cost-consuming, one that many expect to be provided for by the government. There are equally valid reasons why toilets in the slum and *kuppams* are rarely used. Some residents did pause to speculate on the root causes of this problem rather than merely blame the fishermen:

They [the government] did build toilets but not to their requirement or purpose. Often they are built with no good water, drainage or lighting. This is the main reason. All the toilets often have no door, no lights. It is understandable that they don't want to use it. (ECR-310304-02)

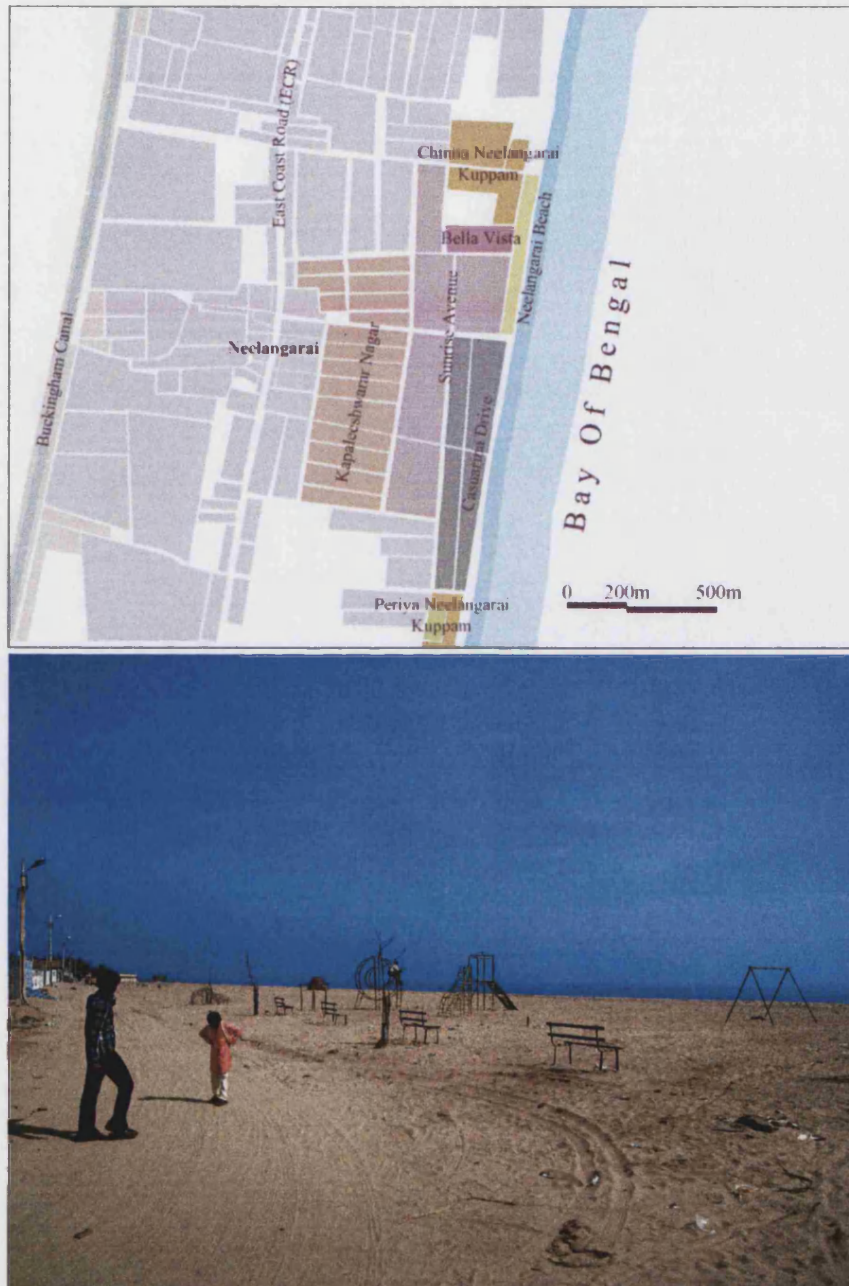
We have not helped them with their lifestyle by putting up a proper set of hygiene stuff for them. We have just like gone in with half measures of

putting in with two toilets somewhere and who cares three toilets and this is not how we live our lives, okay and to expect some 300 people to live with 2 or 3 toilets is not reality, is not valid at all. But that is something that we have done. In that way, I think it has been totally unplanned and that is not a valid proposition at all. (ECR-210304-01)

Quite often the toilets that are built they won't have water at all. So badly maintained that people can't use it. It is all very well to talk you know we have built it for them, why can't they use it and all that. Did you involve them? Did you ask them? I mean, if there is a toilet how will they want it? I mean, they are not consulted. Somebody else decides for them. So this kind of thing is a problem. (ECR-010404-02)

Moreover, in already crowded neighbourhoods, where the *kuppams* and the slums are located in close proximity to the middle and upper class settlements, the location of a public toilet becomes contentious. In Neelangarai, when the residents of Chinna Neelangarai *Kuppam* decided to build a public toilet for their use, it developed into a contested issue as it happened to be close to an upper-class beach resort (Bella Vista and Buena Vista resort complex). The owner of the resort was concerned about a public toilet next to his complex, and fearing adverse impact on his business, obtained a stay order on its construction from the Madras High Court. The half-completed building was eventually demolished (not sure by whom), and the *kuppam* residents continue to use the beachfront as an open-air defecation area (more as an act of defiance now than anything else). Also in retaliation, a children's play area proposed by the middle and upper class residents of Neelangarai was stopped, as they alleged vandalism by the fishermen, an accusation refuted by the latter (Figure 48).

Figure 48: Neelangarai Beach



For the middle class, when it comes to the issue of defecation, fishermen are ‘readily available at hand’ culprits and they refuse to engage with the question of whether they are the only ones. But the use of beach for defecation area is not exclusive to the fishermen, and as the resident of the Thiruvannamiyur *Kuppam* asserted, ‘now it is alright, not so bad. Four years ago it was very bad. Now slowly, step-by-step they [fishermen] have come to a point of using

toilets.....No one uses the seashore' (ECR-090404-01). So who uses it, or as the middle-class residents claim, 'abuses' the beach? In probing this further, middle-class responses again pointed to the poor and the lower classes, but this time, the middle class had an implicit responsibility in sharing a larger part of the blame.

Since the late-1980s, neighbourhoods like Valmiki Nagar along the beach have become the centre of intense construction activities, with the building of several middle and upper class residential complexes. Real-estate sector in India operates still without an 'industry' status, most of the constructions involve dubious capital, and the buildings are often built in violation of building codes and regulations (*Chapter Five*). The numerous construction site workers who slog it out in this sector do so under dire conditions that hardly meet health and safety criteria. Employed on a temporary status, they live in make-shift shelters, and work in sites that have no provisions of basic amenities such as toilets. In this context, construction workers have no choice but to use the nearby beach as a toilet zone. Residents are aware of this:

I do know for a fact that.....when there was construction happening and construction workers weren't given adequate toilets, they used to use the beach. We went and spoke to a lot of these people and discovered that they didn't have either water source or enough toilets.....the thing is that there are some people who don't have choices. I don't know if you can just say low class, lower classes yeah, I don't think lower classes will come from their houses, walk here, use it as a toilet and go back just because they feel like watching the ocean. (ECR-300304-02)

...the people who come and defecate, it is not the *kuppam* people but the construction workers. Lot of them. They have no place to go. So they, early morning, they come. That has to be tackled. (ECR-040904-02)

...so many constructions around where the builder doesn't build a make shift toilet for them. Where will they go? I have found it is much cleaner now once the buildings have been built. There was some construction activity going on. It was very dirty at that time. (ECR-010404-02)

While the domestic needs of the middle class are serviced by the poor and lower classes (*Chapter Five*), the latter are relegated to the shadows in the

middle-class environment. There is no facility in middle-class settlements that acknowledge their presence or provide for them in terms of servants' rest areas or toilets. Middle-class residents hardly pause to consider the possibility of where, during the course of daily work, do their servants go to defecate. As residents, their irresponsibility is more explicit as they are unable to provide the basic amenities for their domestic workers:

See in our building we have a common toilet for the watchmen and for the people who work in our building. Most of them don't provide and they expect the watchmen to stand there the whole day. What will he do? Either he has to do it outside their house or somewhere. He has to use the bathroom sometime during the day. What they do is they go to the beach....I think more than the fisherfolk it is the others who don't have access to any toilets. (ECR-010404-02)

These narratives show that fishermen are not the only ones who defecate on the beach. But blaming the fishermen is an advantageous othering for middle-class residents who have little social interaction with them. In reality, other social groups also defecate on the beach. Comprising mostly of construction workers and domestic servants, their presence though is related to the specific need of meeting the demands of the middle-class settlements, and in the absence of dedicated toilet facilities in the residential complexes, they use the beach for defecation. Thus, in failing to provide for the working classes (this time around there can be no denial that it is their responsibility and not the government's), there is an undeniable middle-class culpability attached to the act of defecating on the beach.

Not necessarily the poor: other sources of dirt

For some residents, defecation is not even an issue, and they consider it only an irritation compared to larger issues of dirt and pollution on the beach:

I don't know, this exact question of defecating on the beach, I think is a western, you know, a western concept that defecating is pollution, which I don't go by. You know, I don't buy this argument at all. See when a westerner sees somebody defecating on the beach, he immediately throws up and says 'Oh my god!', and he has a (fit) you know. But the pollution the westerner causes whether it is an environment burning Carbon Dioxide, driving his car, using CSDs, Chloroflurocarbons, you know, radiation, nuclear waste, uh, he thinks that is cleaner, which is you know

a stupid illogical argument. I rather have a fisherman defecate in the open rather than a gung-ho western put out you know ideas about cleanliness and pollution, coming here and telling us not to defecate on the beach, whereas he is burning up you know far more of the world's resources at a faster pace.....than the poor fishermen. So I would rather have that any day.....really they [the fishermen] haven't polluted the beach using it. They have kept it sparkling clean. They are earning their livelihood. The defecation is definitely not a pollution, that's just producing the western lifestyle that defecation in the open is pollution but to me I mean it is not. It is probably safer and cleaner than having sewers you know, community sewers dumping all the waste. (ECR-310304-01)

In saying so, the above resident dismissed the problem of defecation as a western construction, one that is reproduced by the westernised, transnationalised middle-class residents of the city. It is not just such ideas that are absorbed by the latter. Consumption habits are also replicated, leading to the suggestion that the urban middle class is probably equally or even more guilty of polluting and dirtying the beach than the highly publicised defecators:

...just the way they [fishermen] used to use it is different. The urban people use it differently. So the way they [fishermen] approach was quite different. They in fact, they never messed the place like the urbanites do. Because, here, they bring in outside stuff like plastics and glasses and I mean you name it, it is there. It is amazing the kind of garbage we picked form the beach. You know, from the small plastic bag to chappals [slippers] to clothes. (ECR-270304-03)

In a direct implication of the middle class, particular attention was drawn by some residents towards the way the beachfront has become a dumping ground for the garbage generated after the umpteen rituals conducted by the upper-caste, middle-class Hindu households. Hindu practices amongst the upper caste families involve performance of rituals on a regular basis (sometimes as frequent as every month, in response to certain auspicious moments of the Hindu calendar), and in concurrence with seasonal festivals. Often performed domestically, with flowers, fruits and vegetables, Hindu law decrees that to retain the good spirits and ward off the evil ones, the remains from the ceremonies be disposed in water. While in earlier times, they were thrown into wells located in the backyard of the house, now-a-days, with the disappearance of independent houses, families residing in residential flat complexes come to the beach to dispose them. It is not uncommon, after a particularly popular

festival day to find a large amount of ritual waste lying washed ashore, and this is what many residents observe in their rambles along the water:

But most of the dirt comes from these flowers you know, rituals and then lime, things like that and coconut, they are the ones. And people put it in, the thing is though they are biodegradables, they will put it in a plastic cover and they throw it and naturally the waves brings it back. So people have no concept. (ECR-010404-02)

...because a lot of other garbage on the beach is the stuff that people throw away after their devotional ceremonies, *pujas*, wells are no longer there, I think it plays a big part. (ECR-300304-02)

The repercussions of this type of pollution take on greater significance during prominent festivals when its impact on the seaside is clearly seen. For instance, during the festival of *Ganesha Chathurthi*, the birthday of the elephant-headed Hindu god, idols are taken to the sea in large processions for immersion after a ten day celebration. In recent years, this festival in particular has become immensely popular, celebrated boisterously in public by right-wing Hindu activists (Fuller 2001). But beyond the socio-political implication, there are growing environmental concerns about the impact on the sea of the toxic chemicals of these idols, with environmentalists alleging that these toxins kill fish and other sea organisms. In Chennai, for the past few years, responding to this concern, the City Police has designated specific zones along the sea where such immersions can take place. While this is enforced during big festivals, the police cannot prevent daily beach goers from discarding their ritual waste into the sea (Figure 49).

Figure 49: Other sources of dirt – plastic and ritual waste on the beach



Source: Right – Green Ganesha. (2008, 19 August). *New Indian Express*, p. 3, cautioning against the toxic effects of Ganesha idols.

When one starts speculating on the various sources of dirt and pollution on the beach, it seems that marginal groups such as fishermen and the poor are less responsible than the middle class who, through the sheer mass of their consumption, generate more waste. But the question of consumption is rejected by the middle class whose first instinct is still to blame the poor. In recent times, they have targeted the patronage of commercial interests on the beach by the poor and lower classes by raising their bourgeois version of environmental concerns. The various informal food and snack stalls (referred colloquially as *channa* or *bajji* stalls after the particular type of snacks) are often looked down by middle-class beach users:

..I remember one day, I was really annoyed with this one lady, because she was pouring her leftover oil into the sand.¹⁶⁵ I was trying to tell her not to do that and she, you know, she got really mad, and she talked back....and she said look I am a very poor person. This is my business opportunity and why can't I be here, which made perfect sense to me but you see that is exactly what I am saying that she is very right and she is not doing anything wrong, she is a very poor person and she has a right to be there but she has to use that space responsibly. That is all my point. I am saying this on behalf of the fisherfolk, on behalf of me, on behalf of the beach, that's all. I am saying, don't pour oil there, use the space

¹⁶⁵ The snacks are often fried in oil, and at the end of the day, one can find used oil discarded in the sands. To that extent this observation is right.

responsibly and when you leave it must seem like nobody was there. That's all. (ECR-300304-02)

No, I don't think so [allowing food stalls on the beach].....It is a different thing you having peanuts and some (snacks) which they come and sell. That's a different thing. It is not so bad but I mean this bajji bonda, then they throw the whole oil and onions onto the sand. That's not nice. Yesterday, I saw one whole lot of corns on the sand. He had thrown the whole thing right on the sand. (ECR-010404-02)

These narrations fail to acknowledge that commercial interests cater to all classes of users on the beach, and that none of them tend to leave the beach as if 'nobody was there'. While the middle-class beach users complain against the presence of 'commercial activities', they admit that:

There are different stratas of people, socio-economic, they have their own concept of what they should do on in a place like beach. They have their own affordability levels. You can't say that 'listen, you must be going to an organised shop which sells quality ice cream and not eat at roadside corner shop'. I don't think so. It is a common property. You can have certain rules in terms of hygiene, cleanliness, for proper usage of trash so that people don't make it dirty. (ECR-010404-03)

They are also aware that the formal commercial establishments catering to the middle and upper class beach goers create as much garbage as the informal ones serving the poor and the lower classes (Figure 50). Several popular restaurants have opened alongside New Beach with associated adverse impacts on the beach. An early morning ramble by the backside of these restaurants reveals piled up garbage from these establishments which are not disposed frequently. Yet, the ECBWA maintains that:

There is no disturbance to us from the restaurants. Evenings only they open. In the morning time it is not open. In the evening, the people who come are decent fellows, because it is a costly place, like a hotel, so those who come to eat, if you see they come according to its status. (ECR-040404-01)

When asked about the garbage created by these enterprises, the ECBWA official insisted that 'we cannot avoid that. The government gives permission....they are doing it in their own area' (ECR-040404-01). On the other hand, he vehemently argued for the removal of the informal food stalls on

the basis that '[i]t shouldn't be there. It is not good for health. Over time we need to rectify it.....we need to avoid it. If the association gets the report that they are coming here, selling useless no good stuff, then on health conditions...we have avoided by giving instructions against them'.

Figure 50: Vendors on the beach – informal and formal



Informal food stalls



Restaurants like Bella Ciao are popular with the new middle-class residents

Along the beach today there are quite a few beach clubs, resort complexes, and restaurants which are known to discharge their waste directly into the sea. Yet, the middle-class residents have failed to organise collectively against such pollution, choosing instead to pick on the informal traders. Empowered by the collective strength of an association like the ECBWA, middle-class residents have no qualms about disciplining the hawkers and traders on the beach citing concerns of health and general welfare, but are weak-kneed about taking similar actions against the institutionalised polluters. An easy way of reading this is to say that it is natural for the predator to pick on the weaker ones. As a trait this is highly characteristic of the middle class, and is noticed by the fishermen:

...when we sun dry the fish, some VIPs living nearby complained of smell, saying that pollution should be under control. They act like that, but really, fish, smell of fish or dried fish is specific to its users. There

isn't anything harmful to it. It isn't a breeding ground for mosquitoes or anything harmful to people. It doesn't pollute the beach...fishing doesn't pollute....but if you see today, there is a situation of sewage getting into the sea....From Sindur Sea Club for example there is a direct discharge. It goes to the sea.¹⁶⁶ We were the only ones to object to it. We did. Have you seen what they built? They have put a hole through their compound wall to let their sewage out directly to the sea. (ECR-090404-02)

As patrons of commercial establishments such as clubs and restaurants, the middle class are hardly in a position to chastise the poor or the fishermen for dirtying the beach.

Middle-class residents when confronted with these observations avoid the implication by admitting that in fact, all sections of the society defile the beach. This is done with a certain amount of faux-magnanimity in sharing the blame:

If you take the social classes, you start from the lowest, they go and shit all over and piss all over. That has to stop. That only education can do. Social awareness has got to be created at every level. Middle class are the worst. Some I would say, they will take channa [peanuts] here, like the groundnuts and all and then throw the paper. What? They are the educated class. They are the people who are contributing to a hell lot of garbage. So if you want to improve, you have to educate all of them. (ECR-010404-03)

And the people who actually litter the beach, it is not the illiterate and the poor. It is the well-dressed people who come in bikes who come in cars who put on music, who enjoy the beach and they throw all their wrappers. So that is very disturbing. You know there is no excuse. (ECR-310304-02)

I generally feel that the civic sense of the people in general because of their economic background and more so because of their utter carelessness is pathetic in India. Generally speaking, I know that whether it is urban or whether it is non-urban, you know, people just don't have the sense. Education is not going to change people as far as the civic sense goes. (ECR-250304-02)

¹⁶⁶ This is one of the membership-based beachside clubs that has come up recently in Thiruvannamiyur. Its members include residents of Valmiki Nagar and other neighbourhoods along ECR. This fisherman's observation about middle class aversion to the smell of fish also highlights their upper-caste nature where many households are vegetarians. But as already mentioned in *Chapter Three*, caste implications in the middle class discourse haven't been studied.

In doing so, they reveal the inherent contradiction of their own statements. While the middle class seems to be convinced that civic sense and responsibility are 'enlightened' features, which can be developed through education, the implications of middle-class abuse of public spaces and their inability to confront powerful polluters neutralises the same conviction. The point is that when it comes to public spaces, Indians are still struggling to reach a consented understanding of what is essentially a western concept bequeathed by the colonisers. MB Nirmal, the Exnora President lamented that:

Basically people come there [to the beach]. They still don't know how to use public spaces if you ask me. People are not conscious of how they use public property. Littering, throwing anything where they want, spitting, using it as an open toilet, open bath, food thrown all over, leftovers, you find everything on the beach. That consciousness has not come to the people. (MBN-310804-01)

This point is surprisingly well understood by many middle-class residents in explaining their inability to develop a crystal clear discourse as far as civic responsibilities in public spaces are concerned:

People just lack the sense. Outside of their house there can be a dump yard right in front of their house, you don't care about it. You keep your house clean but you dump all your, you know, waste just outside and through the door. Why can't you ensure that your vicinity, your compound wall is kept clean? People just don't do that. That is the worst thing in India. (ECR-250304-02)

...somewhere along the line, our Hindu tradition, our Hindu philosophy and everything, never had any community based actions or initiatives, you know. If you look at the Hindu system of life and it was very, even in you know, the householder would sweep his compound and throw the rubbish outside his gate. His compound will be very spic and span and that philosophy has been sort of inbuilt into all of us. You keep your little environment clean, you are not bothered about what happens outside. I meant, if you go to any little town in South India, you will see this phenomenon. Their little backyard will be spic and span but the rubbish will be thrown on the road or thrown across. I think this somehow filters down to your philosophy of life because you are also just worried about your immediate, you know, surrounding which is your own little house, own little building whatever. (ECR-310304-01)¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ These quotes echo Mishra's (1995) statement cited in the beginning of *Chapter Five*.

Dark side of the beach: dangerous others

The concept of the outside as something that is not amenable to control results in the exterior being abandoned to an intrinsic disorderliness where no order, rules, restraints could be expected (Chakrabarty 1992; Kaviraj 1997). This notion of dirt is accompanied by a fear of danger, as the outside and its system of open spaces portray a deeply ambiguous character, full of malevolence, suspect and dangerous. 'All that do not belong to the "inside" (family/kinship/community) lie there, cheek by jowl, in unassorted collection, violating rules of mixing: from faeces to prostitutes. It is, in other words, a place against which one needs protection' (Chakrabarty 1992: 543).

It is common to see frequent portrayals of the beach and other public spaces in the city as dangerous zones, lacking in safety and security for the general public. This is unanimously presented by the state, the media and the beachgoers. In justifying the demolition of various structures on the Marina Beach, the government claimed that the unused structures were being used by 'anti-social elements' and that demolition was necessary in the interests of public safety.¹⁶⁸ Similarly, an article in *The Hindu* in 2002 brought attention to fact that '[c]ivic neglect and growing crime rate has felled the pride of the city'. Some of the issues mentioned included 'waylaying and soliciting', chain-snatching, 'other "organised" crime, and the use of some of the beach structures for "clandestine" activities'.¹⁶⁹ The fear of safety is highlighted by many of the middle-class residents living along the beachside residential neighbourhoods:

The beach has become very unsafe in the evenings with all kinds of shady things going on, you know. (ECR-070304-04)

I do not know if it [Thiruvannamiyur Beach] is still safe. I would not think so. Previously, we used to walk to Thiruvannamiyur Beach...Now we try to take our car up to Thiruvannamiyur Beach because lots of incidents have happened.....Safety is still a big issue. It is, if safety is something that you are also looking at as a problem, safety is still an issue. (ECR-250304-02)

¹⁶⁸ High-powered panel for beach improvement. (2003, 11 August). *The Hindu*, p. 1.

¹⁶⁹ Subramanian, K. (2002, 04 August). Pride of city under neglect. *The Hindu*, p. 3.

At one level, it is understandable that public spaces are feared as 'dark' spaces (literally and not so literally) and potential zones of social disorder: 'I know that the first time I went on this turtle walk [late in the night] I said, am I sticking my head out...the perception of beach being this dark place in the night where you can do things that you won't do, you know', a resident recollected (ECR-303004-02). But while the fear of beachgoers is mainly a psychological construct that induces perceptions of danger and disorder, it is reinforced by social institutions. There may be no real correlation between the perception of danger and actual crime statistics, but measures are often introduced to allay these fears. As residents talk about 'various instances of people getting mugged and robbed', and wish to ensure that 'theft, robberies should not happen' (ECR-040904-01), lighting (both street lights and high-mast lights) and police patrolling on the beach are introduced to allay their fears:

Because there is light, people are; If there is no light there is no security...We are bothered about us, you know. Because everybody goes and sits there, so safety point of view, I am thinking even beach when you go there with family, we see the watch, 'Oh! 6:30! We have to go, go, go, go, it's dark. So when light it there, though you can't really say that it is safer with the lights, but you can see somebody's face, it is reassuring. (ECR-310304-02)

No, this [lighting] is a good thing because people feel a little safe you know. And there are lights and there is place for people to come and sit down. It is so nice to see all the women come and sit there, it is a meeting place for many people. (ECR-010404-02)

Installation of lights and police booths along the beach is seen not just in terms of safety and security but also as overall infrastructure improvement:

This comes under beautification. If you see seashore beautification throughout from Marina, if you see, there will be this lighting. But not just in this particular area, throughout beach areas if you see, even in Bombay Marine Drive, see there, what a lighting! Like that, there is no harmful effect. Today, public should be able to come, sit and leave without fear. (ECR-040404-01)

While this may be true at one level, beachside residents and walkers emphasise its need mostly through an articulation of fear.

Here, akin to Chakrabarty's (1992) portrayal of the open and the outside as malevolent and dangerous spaces, the middle class view public spaces as spaces for the pervert and the dissident. Spaces like the beach are sites of social transgressions and human actions, unconstrained by political or social laws or mores. The question then is who in the minds of the middle-class residents are the moral transgressors? An obvious answer is all those who do not adhere to the bourgeois scripts of 'proper' public behaviour, which involves a class-based subscription, and as a result the transgressors portrayed as the 'dangerous classes' are defined and underlined by poverty and social marginality. The stand-off between middle-class users and the urban underclass reaches its boiling point in the public spaces when almost all the marginalised sections of the society are clubbed together as the deviant other. This is the zone where 'you have drug peddling there, then illegal booze, prostitution, if you want to keep up prostitutes you go to Elliot's Beach. Elliot's Beach is known as the (prostitute zone)' (ECR-040904-03), and as an elderly female beach walker noted 'it pains me as a women to see that the beach is the place where girls go cheap now' (ECR-310304-02).¹⁷⁰

In the first instance, transgressors are clubbed together into one category, and held responsible for all socially non-conforming actions. Mostly, it is the fishermen, as seen in a report in *The Hindu* on *Squalor on the shore*, which wrote that the fishermen huts are used for 'clandestine activities', and that the fishermen *kuppams* are supposed to be the 'hotbed of mercenaries and

¹⁷⁰ Given the fact that she was an elderly 'traditional' woman, it doesn't come as a surprise that she sees women in public places as morally loose and without virtue. In a society where codes of behaviour particularly those involving physical contact between men and women is highly circumscribed, public spaces like parks and beaches have developed the reputation of being places where male-female relationships could be more 'loosely' expressed outside of the strictures of the domestic definitions.

criminals'.¹⁷¹ They are generally held responsible for any untoward social incidents that take place on the beach:

...Thiruvannamiyur *kuppam*...has become one big stretch...a very big slum...They are also into crime typically. So then they [the police] won't come in. They have not entered, the police. To that extent, there is this; all *kuppams* are slums because that is where political parties recruit their henchmen, like that. They can be, they are like mercenary bullies, there will be some people, not all of them, some people. (ECR-010404-04)

An earlier section in this chapter has already analysed fishermen's support of development projects like lighting as an opportunity to absolve themselves of the usual crime accusations made by the middle class. Fishermen from Thiruvannamiyur *Kuppam* felt that installing lighting on the beach would help identify the real criminals instead of baselessly incriminating them. And to a certain extent, not all residents depict them as criminals:

...the perception that fishermen are actually criminals....the criminals come from outside....I realised that, I can't say for sure, but I never ever once had a problem. In fact, it was safer when we were walking through the fishing villages than when we were walking between the villages. (ECR-270304-01)

But the middle class still look at poverty as nurturing crime. Talking about 'some bad elements' lurking around in the beach, a resident brought attention to a particular incident where a beach walker had been robbed of his cell phone and when the thieves were robbed, they turned out to be 'guys, these were six young boys, from these nearby areas, the slums....but these kind of incidents really puts you off going to the beach' (ECR-25304-02).

Relating a particular incident of harassment on the beach, a resident was unwilling to identify the fishermen from nearby *kuppams*, but felt that it was someone poor. On further probing, he immediately clarified and said: 'there are good people, bad people. You think middle classes don't have bad people, upper class won't have bad people...these are all, poor people when they do something wrong it comes out very blatantly, everybody is jumping on

¹⁷¹ Vythianathan, S. (1996, 16 September). Squalor on the shore. *The Hindu*, p. Metro Section 1.

their backs, these rascals are doing it!'. He further added: 'when the people are not having money, any individual will do it, not just the fishermen. Of the ten of them who might be fishermen, one might be the criminal, *even within ours*, how do you find everyone is 100 percent honest?' (ECR-010404-03, emphasis added).

His narration shows that a senseless clubbing together of all social transgressors into one 'dangerous class' is soon derailed when one probes the residents further to disaggregate the various 'anti-social' activities on the beach. When asked to elaborate on who they exactly refer to when they say that the crowd is not very nice anymore, most of them ended up doing a volte-face, pointing at their own classes, this time a particular segment, the youngsters:

...you do get even during week nights you do get quite early on, they come up for what they call fun, young people, young boys, and a lot of it essentially harassment. You don't have a very nice crowd coming in and what is interesting is that a lot of family friends who used to come out with their children don't anymore.....yeah, then from 7:30pm onwards you have then beachgoers who come in their motorbikes, lot of young students on their motorbikes, they come. Walking here with children when they race up and down...it is no fun to go then because you are so much concerned about the safety of the children. (ECR-070304-04)

One thing clearly, a beach, I don't know, looks like people have started thinking that, I mean, that why everybody has to have a cell phone and their own motorcycle, and they thought that visiting a beach is also a necessity in life. It's as if they come there not for enjoying the beach. A lot of youngsters who come to the beach are all for other purposes, very noisy, not for peaceful purposes at all, the air doesn't sound healthy at all.....they don't care about surrounding, other people. They are more of animals than human beings. That's what I think, especially the youngsters, okay. They have become too bad really. (ECR-310304-02)

In fact, many of the 'anti-social' activities identified by the beach users including booze, drugs and prostitution directly implicate the middle and upper class youngsters who are prominent consumers of this 'illegal' market. A resident cynically said, 'I would rather have the boys from the *kuppam* hanging around than these upper class boys with their alcohol bottles on the beach' (ECR-310304-02). It may seem as if the youngsters are viewed harshly,

particularly given the middle-aged nature of the beach walkers and their general disillusionment with the contemporary lifestyles of the youngsters.

At the same time it cannot be denied that spaces like the beach are the few spaces in the city where they are not compelled by stringent norms and regulations, and find an opportunity to exercise hedonism to some extent. In a society where prohibition still reigns supreme, and consumption of alcohol in public is highly monitored, the beach lined with recreational and leisure activities has become a popular destination for the casual gathering of young people. The behaviour of the middle and upper class youngsters while determined by their own definitions of expanding leisure and consumption, and by a lifestyle parameter that is specific to their age group, is perceived by other middle-class beach goers as inimical and suggestive of the 'dangerous class'. What is unique here is that unlike most cases where youth gangs are still demarcated by class boundaries and almost instantaneously associated with the poor and lower classes, in this particular case, they are home grown 'vagrants' blooming in the middle-class backyards. It not only illustrates the incompleteness of the process of othering, but also brings to the forefront the fact that the more the middle class attempt to distinguish themselves through a class-based condemnation of the other, the more they find themselves paradoxically implicated and inculpated. The contradictions leave the middle-class opinions fractured, and thus renders problematic their practice of ordering and the parallel process of othering. This can be noted in the following extracts from two readers' letters to the editor that appeared in *Madras Musings*, where the first described what he considered to be a beach tragedy and the second responded by viewing it as an unintended good:

..I have been living very close to this beach [Elliot's Beach] since 1980. There is a tribe of philistines, mostly young and obviously from affluent families who visit the beach in droves on holidays. Most of them seem to have been provided with expensive two-wheelers and cars, which they drive to and fro at breakneck speed, with loud music blaring even after midnight and disturbing the families living in houses situated on these streets.¹⁷²

¹⁷² Beach tragedy. (1996, 16-30 September). *Madras Musings*, p. 3.

R. C. Narayan has been a witness to the 'Beach Tragedy' (MM, Sept. 16) enacted by the affluent 'philistines' who ride expensive two-wheeler/cars and disturb students in and around Besant Nagar by playing loud music and driving their vehicles at breakneck speed, in the dead of night...I, however, see some unintended good from these late night and early morning activities of the goons. Their presence prevents the slum-dwellers from using the entire beach area as an open air lavatory! The residents close to the Beach should thank the intruders on this count alone.¹⁷³

6.4 Conclusion

In the early weeks of fieldwork, a freelance journalist writing on city development issues offered some help in the selection of study areas. When the objective of the research was explained as examining middle-class construction of citizenship, and that public spaces would constitute one realm of the study, she regretted not starting earlier when the QMC crisis was at its peak (April 2003), and exclaimed that this movement proved the ability of the middle class to participate successfully as citizens in the public sphere. A few weeks later, walking along New Beach, she once again proudly asserted the achievements of middle-class residents in transforming this strip, another example, according to her, of buoyant middle-class activism. Though the middle-class role in shaping the debates surrounding both examples cannot be denied, she failed to question the highly differentiated nature of the response coming from a same class of actors. Rather than assuming their reactions as particularistic and case-specific, this chapter has sought to probe deeper the variegated nature of the middle-class discourse related to the re-imagination of the beach.

While it is generally acknowledged that neoliberalisation offers the middle class an argumentative framework within which their bourgeois ideology can develop as a master narrative, the case studies of the Marina and the New Beach show that the bourgeois narrative by operating within the politics of partnership is contingent upon affiliations forged between different actors, and depends on the organised nature of middle-class participation. In

¹⁷³ Unintended good. (1996, 1-15 November). *Madras Musings*, p. 3.

the case of the Marina, their involvement was in the form of civil society institutions associated with environmental and heritage issues, with their bourgeois discourse aligning with the interests of the political society (fishermen and student groups) and in contradiction to the bourgeois imaginary of the state. Analysis of the debate reveals a subjective bourgeois ideology, and that there isn't a universal one-size-fits-all template for its imagery.

The convergence of middle-class interests with that of the state is more acutely seen in the southern shoreline where, the inter-personal associational nature of the middle-class residents' associations involved in the transformations of this beach strip rendered a coalition with the state more desirable. But this is set firmly against the possibility of partnering with the political society (fishermen). In New Beach, residents' associations involved in its 'upkeep' have cleverly solicited the state as visible consumers and prominent users while keeping the fishermen out of the equation. Using the bourgeois ideology of order, their discourse is dominated by concerns of dirt and danger, both of which use the process of othering to implicate the fishermen and the poor as improper users of the beach. But a detailed examination of the middle-class position reveals that the practice of ordering and its parallel associated process of othering is a weakly constructed one, incapable of not only distinguishing a righteous bourgeois self from an aberrant other but in the end produces a deviant bourgeois identity that is very much implicated in the other.

7

Conclusion: From a politics of indifference to a politics of intolerance?

We're [the middle class] a rentier class left over from the last century. We tolerate everything, but we know that liberal values are designed to make us passive...We're deeply self-centred but can't cope with the idea of our finite selves...We believe in equality but hate the underclass. (Ballard 2003: 139)

Millennium People, the eighteenth novel of the maverick English writer JG Ballard (2003) follows a group of disillusioned middle-class residents in London, whose aim is to rouse their docile social class to anger and violence, and dismantle the self-imposed burdens of civic responsibility and the trappings of a consumer society.¹⁷⁴ It explores the middle-class psyche, beginning with picketing and peaceful demonstrations against the usual bourgeois anxieties of maintenance fees and parking charges, but eventually spiralling out of control in the form of violent protests on the streets, with the middle class systematically torching video stores, attacking travel agencies, and sabotaging museums and galleries.

¹⁷⁴ Portrayal of middle class angst and the social disruption caused by their inexplicable acts of explosive violence is a long-running theme in several of Ballard's novels. But while his earlier novels focused on a single middle class individual, *Millennium People* comes closest to highlighting the possibility of a collective bourgeois revolution (see Noys 2007).

Despite the deadpan humour with which Ballard approaches his fictional prolepsis of middle-class dissent, there is concern over several prejudices that he advertently (or inadvertently) subscribes to. At moments of peaking ‘middle-class revolt’, several characters in the novel describe the middle class as the “new proletariat”, not just in terms of being enslaved by a capitalist (consumer) culture, but also in the way they take to the streets, intolerant and violent. There are as well instances when the middle-class residents refer to their enclosed residential enclave as a ‘high-priced slum’ and a ‘sink estate’, comparing their action of setting ablaze their bourgeois homes to the way working people torch their council estates. As they exclaim that they are now the “underclass” of the bourgeoisie, all the stereotypes of the lumpen-proletariat are played out, particularly when Dr. Gould, the enigmatic character spearheading the middle-class revolution, claims that ‘[b]reaking the law is a huge challenge for professionals...That’s why the middle class will never be a true proletariat’ (2003: 169), and David Markham, the protagonist (of sorts) insists that ‘[v]iolence isn’t our thing. We’re too much bourgeois’ (2003: 190).

In this context, Noys (2007: 399) identifies a ‘reactionary libido’ in Ballard’s works when he compares *Millennium People* with his follow-up novel *Kingdom Come* (2006), where, in contrast to the former’s treatment of middle-class revolt in a relatively tolerant fashion, the latter ‘focuses on a potential revolution amongst the working-class and petit-bourgeois inhabitants’ in ‘a patrician, or even reactionary, critique of working-class culture’, condemning it as fascist, “vulgar” and “destructive”, while middle-class consumption is presumed to be “tasteful” and “healthy”. When Markham in *Millennium People* concludes that the middle-class revolution was doomed because nature had bred them to be docile, virtuous and civic-minded, it is obvious that Ballard is simply toeing the line of a well-established preconception (or misconception) that the middle class is incapable of intolerance and violence.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁵ Although Ballard (2003) in an interview opined that it is ‘a myth to think that the middle classes are incapable of violence’, what comes across in the *Millennium People* is the

For, the middle class, by establishing an affinity with liberalism, emerged in the industrial era as a tempered social class, perpetuating a 'middle-class mentality' that is constitutive of a disciplinary ethos embracing tolerance, hard work, and a strict moral code. Such an understanding reached a heightened status of endorsement in the post-War period when the middle class was considered crucial to the modernisation strategies of the 1950s and 1960s contra to an unreliable working class which needed to be managed and disciplined. Lipset (1959) epitomised this belief best when he argued that although the working class is economically more liberal than the middle class, it is also more authoritarian and intolerant, an aspect he attributed to low income, low-status occupation, and little education, while the middle class is committed to democratic norms and a sophisticated, complex view of the political structure which makes necessary the norms of tolerance.¹⁷⁶

But, can everyday mores of the middle class including moderation and reluctance to pass judgement (Wolfe 1998), be explained as tolerance on their part or is it more a reflection of their indifference? Philosophers and political thinkers ruminating on toleration explain that while tolerance is a moral virtue, necessary when one rejects the convictions of others, indifference is not, as it is based on a morality of condescension. And what one generally encounters is a liberal synthesis of toleration that is embedded with aspects of both indifference and intolerance.¹⁷⁷

One only needs to take a cursory look through the readers' mail section in Indian daily newspapers to realise that tolerance remains a utopian virtue for

perception that the tolerance of the middle class gives way to violent expressions only when the middle class find themselves impoverished, and become part of the "new poor", thereby embracing the reactions of the proletariat. For the interview, see Bearn, E. (2003, 1-15 November). A rebel in suburbia. *Telegraph*. Retrieved 21 May, 2008

¹⁷⁶ This view has understandably generated much argument in sociological circles where scholars have tried to prove and disprove Lipset's thesis through their own set of empirical investigations, but consensus is still elusive.

¹⁷⁷ See for instance, Mendus (1999); Walzer (1987, 1997a; 1997b); Habermas (2003); Galeotti (2001); Seligman (2004, 2008).

the middle class which finds its ground expression in the extremes of indifference and intolerance. The complaints that fill this passive yet popular 'public forum' include everything from the macro concerns of economic development, education, foreign policy, national unity, secularism/religious fundamentalism, and nuclear (dis)armament to the nitty-gritty, micro-level problems of everyday life involving irregular bus/train services, garbage collection, potholes in local neighbourhood roads, water supply and pavement encroachments. In all these issues, the write-up is pretty much the same: a 'concerned citizen' who wishes to bring attention to the indifference of government officials to the present-day state of affairs, and who invariably concludes by emphasising that 'one cannot tolerate this neglect anymore'. The writers in accusing the state authorities of indifference are only convicting themselves as much of the state machinery is dominated by middle-class bureaucrats and values, and hence, as one could comfortably argue, reeks of 'middle-class indifference'.

Many of the middle-class residents readily acknowledged in the interviews that indifference is an inherent (non)expression of their quotidian practices. This trait is one of the first things that scholars studying the Indian middle-class identify (Varma 1998; Fernandes 2000a, 2000b; Mazzerella 2003), with some going to the extent of accusing the middle class of even a lack of social conscience (Gupta 2000). There is also the suggestion that their politics of indifference is giving way to a politics of intolerance, mostly associated with their increased propensity for self-gratification. Thus, when a middle-class individual writes in the English dailies insisting on his inability to tolerate certain conditions any longer, (s)he represents a growing middle-class intolerance and exigency for quick action that is beginning to dominate the agenda of urban change in several cities, and not just in India.

There are several reasons that account for this shift from indifference to intolerance at the present moment. A convenient culprit is of course neoliberalism where it could be argued that a retrenched state bureaucracy

amidst the dominance of private/global capital is making the middle class even more anxious as the 'welfare spoils' are further reduced. Indeed blaming neoliberalism has some heuristic value not only because it has increased the confidence of the middle class in themselves and their bourgeois values, but has also contributed to their ontological insecurity by polarising the society sharply. Their intolerance comes from their supposed frustration at not progressing their efforts rapidly enough to enhance their quality of life, opportunities which are more available now than before.

But unlike Ballard's (2003) middle-class characters in *Millennium People* who were rebelling against themselves, setting arson to the very civic institutions that bound them to a liberal cultural consensus, bourgeois revolt in real life targets mostly the urban disadvantaged as the cause of social chaos. This is discernible in India where the middle class in their concerted attempt to clean up the cities have initiated a 'politics of forgetting' (Fernandes 2004) against marginalised groups whose exclusion from the aestheticised envisioning of urban spaces is justified not merely through arguments of illegitimacy and incrimination but also more worrying, by tying it to the powerful discourse of citizenship. As Gandy (2008) reveals, the burgeoning middle-class intolerance towards the poor is based on a reconstruction of urban space where they are portrayed as impostors, and is set within a weak civil society whose practice of citizenship has been deeply coded by moralistic social distinctions rather than by any clearly articulated conception of human rights. In a context where there has rarely been an equal and uniform exercise of the rights of citizenship, the argument made by the middle class staking a moral claim to citizenship is a cause for alarm. This is because their position disallows large sections of the urban poor to be treated as legitimate citizens, since the habitation and livelihood of the poor are often premised on a violation of law (Chatterjee 2004). It is against this recognition that this thesis has contoured the emerging aspects of urban citizenship in a postcolonial Indian city.

Chapter One approached with caution the jubilant assertion that cities can be ideal breeding ground for the emergence of citizenship in neoliberal times. The ability of neoliberal citizenship to uphold the imaginary of commensurable citizens is questioned, as it disseminates a paradigm of citizenship based on a bourgeois ethic of propriety and property, thereby creating a more exclusive form of citizenship. Needless to say, the embourgeoisement of citizenship finds its expression in the emerging 'new' middle class, which makes it essential to understand the epistemology and ontology of this social group before undertaking an investigation of their claims to cities and citizenship.

Chapter Two addressed the analytical importance to undertake a detailed examination of this problematic social class, and goes beyond the traditional concerns of what actually comprises the middle class (a bit of the capitalist and a bit of the labourer). It focuses on the significance of the middle class in a postcolonial society like India where it is seen as a member of the "ruling coalition", and hence an ally of the capitalist state. What is equally relevant is the speculation about the elitist and bourgeois tendencies of the Indian middle class, characteristics which are supposed to find heightened expressions in the new middle class, as they subscribe increasingly to the culture of materialism, individualism and conspicuous consumption. The argument as well is that the new middle class, as a product of neoliberalisation, is attempting to create a central, normative position for itself, by invoking citizenship claims in pursuit of what could be construed as clear hegemonic aspirations for the city. But given its political illiberalism, the suspicion is that the resulting bourgeois citizenship will be a defective one.

Chapter Three detailed the rigour and rigmarole of tackling subjectivity on field –given the choice of methodology: qualitative research techniques, and the complexity arising from the decision of not just conversing with the 'citizens' but with the city as well. It complemented *Chapter Two* by elaborating on the fieldwork experience of interviewing the middle class, a sort

of comparing notes between what is said in theory and what you find in practice. Details of the case study areas were provided, selections based on the recent 'urban turn' in the city, one that is expanded upon in the following chapter.

Chapter Four looked at the political economy of postcolonial Chennai, and provided a development history of the city as it is held in tension between being a capital of a regional Tamil state and a metropolis of a postcolonial Indian nation-state. The superficial development agenda of successive Dravidian governments meant that the city's role was reduced to a mere backdrop for staging the Dravidian spectacle. This resulted in a malignant city that was symptomatic of the decadent 1970s, a condition that peaked in the 1980s when the city was literally left ungoverned. All this changed in the 1990s with the official onset of neoliberalisation which placed the onus on the regional states to implement economic reforms. No longer able to harbour an indifferent or a superficially defined stance towards the city, as it literally became an investment 'bait', Dravidian politicians ushered in a process of embourgeoisement amidst hopes that the pursuit of a 'bourgeois urbanism' would be successful in attracting transnational investors. But the gains of neoliberalism failed to translate uniformly across the city's geography, and instead created a sorry tale of two cities, a blighted 'North Madras' and a booming 'South Chennai', with the latter proving to be the epicentre of global capital investment. It is in this context of southbound growth that fieldwork is set in the southern part of the city.

Based on Kumar's (1993) argument that civil society is an essential social order of citizenship, and Chatterjee's (2004) postulation that civil society as bourgeois society is inhabited in India by a small section of elites and the middle class claiming to be proper citizens, *Chapter Five* investigated middle-class residents' associations as an alternative civil society. Residents' associations are the most prominent form of collective action for the urban middle class, offering them the best platform for engagement as citizens. In this

exploration, the chapter queried their participation in the new geography of governance that emerges in a neoliberal context, one requiring a politics of partnership with local communities, other civil society initiatives, and the state.

However fieldwork revealed that residents' associations are so prone to fragmentation and question the value of federating amongst themselves for the purposes of addressing concerns over a wider geography. There is also a problem of the residents' associations engaging with the political society of the poor. In most Indian cities, middle-class residential colonies often exist cheek-by-jowl next to the slums and working class neighbourhoods. While this is convenient for the middle-class residents whose domestic needs are serviced by the residents of the slums (in the form of maids, drivers, errand boys, and security guards), interactions at the associational level between the two social groups have been minimal and mostly in the form of patron-client relationships. In recent times, engaging with the poor has become more problematic as the middle-class residents' associations increasingly turn hostile to their presence, and adopt a discourse of illegitimacy and incrimination. The concerns of the residents' association reveal a marked intolerance of the poor who are portrayed as encroachers, mercenary criminals, and even as extortionists. It can be argued that while the old middle-class residential colonies failed to partner with the neighbouring poor because of their preference for a relationship of patronage rather than partnership, the new middle-class are more viciously condemning the poor. Their position is marked by a clear sense of social censure, accompanied by attempts at spatial closure but in the context of 'volatile geographies' of a postcolonial city this is easier said than done.

Yet, it is not just with the political society that the middle-class residents' associations' engagement oscillates between indifference and intolerance. It applies as well to their relationship with other more institutionalised and formalised forms of civil society. While they acknowledged the opportunities that NGOs and what they termed as 'proper'

civil society organisations offered to address a wider canvas of issues, they find them less useful, particularly to tackle demands of service provision, giving the increasing privatisation of public services. Residents who maintain a dual role as members of residents' associations and NGOs preferred to separate both realms and didn't see the need for 'mixing the two causes'. Most residents are indifferent to the activities of NGOs in their own area, prejudiced that grassroots initiatives or bottom-up approaches are for 'have nots' and not for the 'haves'.

The reluctance of the middle class for civic engagement reached a climax when it came to the possibility of engaging with the state. Given the bourgeois policies of a neoliberal state, one would have expected a convergence between a bourgeois state and a bourgeois middle class. Yet, the middle class were found to be in no mood to engage with the state even if it were on issues pertaining to their own interests. Their long-harboured ill-feelings towards politicians and democracy was addressed in *Chapter Two*. Not willing to be mistaken as a collective vote-bank by the politicians, à la the poor, middle-class residents' associations shun any direct encounters with politicians preferring to engage at best with the state bureaucrats and 'officials' for their needs. Middle-class indifference to state gestures can be explained by its needs which are increasingly set in the realm of consumption, and to which they make their claims as consumer-citizens, constructing their argument as 'buyers', not 'beggars'. The hyphenated condition of consumer-citizenship makes an understanding of middle-class notion of citizenship more complex and intricate as the middle-class themselves are only just beginning to discern a pattern to their 'random' manoeuvres between the demands of a citizen and that of a consumer.

Chapter Six explored their citizenship claims in the associated realm of public sphere. Given the bourgeois predilections of the state and civil society, one cannot help but wonder if the public sphere can continue as an active realm for an impartial enactment of citizenship. In the context of Indian cities this is

felt acutely in the recent conflicts over public spaces which are representational spaces of the public sphere. Public spaces have always posed a challenge to Indian users who negotiate it through a web of class and cultural biases. As a result, elites, middle class and the poor alike have been found guilty of a general lack of civic sense or public consciousness. And yet, the middle class often insists and clarifies that they are not like the 'dirty poor', amidst claims of having acquired newfound sensibilities towards public spaces. Similar to the previous chapter, their discourse on public spaces (in this instance, the beach) is studied through an analysis of the emerging politics of partnership which requires engagement of sorts between the state, the 'civil society' of the middle class, and the political society of the masses. The complexity of this partnership is rendered problematic by the fact that the 'spatial complex' of open spaces in Indian cities were originally defined by a concept of 'commonness' that was clearly not 'public', and one that still lingers in the fishermen's notion of the use of the spaces of the beach. On the other hand, it is not surprising that, given the bourgeois concept of 'public', the middle class subscribes to this definition thereby setting themselves up in conflict with other groups who persist with its use based on an understanding of 'commonness'.

What emerges in this condition is the ambiguity of the middle class in defining a clear position, depending on the nature of the conflict, and the stretch of the beach under consideration. In examining the involvement of the middle class in the attempts to re-imagine the Marina Beach, the most 'public' of several beach stretches in the city, it seemed that their role was more appreciable as an institutional activist working on behalf of 'public interest'. But as their reactions were specific to particular state-led proposals to remake the Marina, the impossibility of a unanimous middle-class position became clear. Instead one encountered a multiplicity of bourgeois voices, some in complicity and others in contrariety. The infeasibility of middle-class civic concern resonating together on every single occasion was visible.

In the more parochial beach stretches in the city, deliberations of middle-class collectivity came not in the form of institutionalised civil society organisations but as residents' associations of beachside inhabitants. Associating shoreline residence with a 'lifestyle' choice, residents' associations are committed to the maintenance of the beach in the absence of sufficient state effort, viewing the beach as an extension of their own 'backyard'. There is a clear attempt to differentiate it from the Marina as they invoke a cleanliness discourse based on their aversion to crowd (read as the poor and the lower classes). But their efforts require a dedicated amount of volunteerism from the residents. Given the middle-class propensity to relapse easily into a state of indifference, it came as no surprise that the first attempt (*Beach Buddies*) died a natural death after a few episodes of enthusiastic participation. The insistence of *Beach Buddies* on limiting it to a narrow clique of like-minded people didn't help in furthering its cause either, as its members developed a fundamental distrust of 'others'. Thus, fishermen who lived in nearby *kuppams* were kept deliberately out of such efforts, claiming a 'different set of sensibilities'.

This effort was soon replaced by a more institutionalised form of organisation (ECBWA), again involving middle-class residents. Unlike the earlier initiative, this is more successful as it built shrewdly on a politics of partnership, engaging mostly with the state, but again to the exclusion of other social groups. Its agenda is based on a consumerist angle as it sought to increase their membership and thereby the strength of its collectivist demand. Its failure again to involve the fishermen is explained away by a mutual condition of indifference on either side, as well as the argument that 'it is the middle class that by and large who use the beaches'. Unlike the opposition of middle-class civic institutions to the Marina redevelopment proposals, this association actually endorsed the state efforts to transform the Marina and rued that the fishermen were not allowing 'development' to proceed.

The fishermen in response are mostly phlegmatic about such opinions. Many of them do not practice fishing anymore, and are often engaged by the

neighbouring middle-class community as security guards and domestic workers. Coming in close contact with their 'lifestyle' they are desirous of 'development' thus endorsing the recent physical improvements to the beach. While the fishermen display a fatalistic acceptance of middle-class attempts at ordering the beach, they resent their portrayal and rejection by the middle class as a deviant 'other'. Bourgeois depictions of dirt and danger on the beach point fingers at the poor masses who, through their inability to appreciate the niceties of the 'public', become easy culprits. But probing the middle class further on the reasons for dirt, revealed that in addition to the issue of defecation on the beach (a practice associated with the fishermen and the poor), they could not deny that they themselves contribute to much of the debris on the beach, mainly through the sheer magnitude of their consumption practices. No where is the contradiction of the middle class more apparent than in their attempts to build a public space discourse where, on the one hand they view civic sense and responsibility as an 'enlightened' feature, while on the other, they implicate themselves as abusers of public spaces as much as the other classes. As the middle class residents discovered, dirt and danger can be traced as much to the 'uncultured' habits of the poor as to the 'errant' behaviour of their own class.

Much of this discourse about the beach and public spaces in general drastically changes when viewed against the backdrop of the 2004 tsunami which occurred a few months after the completion of fieldwork in September 2004. This was soon followed by another natural disaster, the 2005 floods, both affecting poor communities to a large extent. The 2004 tsunami in particular triggered a groundswell of sympathy and relief work in the initial months, settling since then into a complex machinery of rehabilitation. The role of the middle class in these initiatives is not to be undermined, given the fact that after the preliminary spell of charitable actions, it is the middle class that is largely 'calling the shots', either as members of NGOs involved in the rehabilitation efforts, or as technical experts advising the state in rewriting the coastal regulations and proposing new forms of managing shoreline

communities (mostly the marginalised ones). This is taking place amidst a nagging suspicion that such natural disasters have not altered the indifferent/intolerant position of the middle class towards the marginalised communities such as the fishermen residing along the coast and the poor squatters along the rivers, canals and creeks.¹⁷⁸ There are further fears that natural disasters like the 2004 tsunami and the 2005 floods have created a tabula rasa for a clean pursuit of elitist re-imagination of the coast. This is of course a hypothetical postulation and needs to be examined in greater detail.¹⁷⁹

The conclusions noted above force the larger question of what these findings reveal about the politics of the middle class. In a sense the question is a theoretical echo as *Chapter Two* has already asked if there is a politics which typifies the middle class, particularly when they prefer to be active political actors through a process of “depoliticisation”. It was in response to this query that this research engaged with investigating the emerging politics of the middle class amidst concerns that it may be based on a narrowly defined bourgeois narrative. Such a supposition is bound to raise fears of bleak conclusions, where one expects to find a scenario of a complete ‘discourse capture’ by one powerful group (in this case, the middle class), overbearingly muting the voices of ‘irrelevant others’. But what emerges from this thesis is that the assertions of the middle class take place in a context of ‘politics of partnership’ which dictates the ‘new geography of governance’ (*Chapters Five and Six*). It involves actors from all social groups and creates a constant flux of changes with each actor deploying strategies and tactics to achieve their particular ends. As Zunino (2006) explains, with private and public actors coming together, the power configurations are particularistic, illustrating the differential capacity of actors to exert power. While power is unequally

¹⁷⁸ Rutten (2001) in the context of the 2001 earthquake in Gujarat finds that initial middle class displays of social concern and help for victims in no way contradicts statements about their increasing indifference or even intolerance to the plight of the poor in their society. Rather, they reveal a brutal ruthlessness where they blame the poor for their unhappy state.

¹⁷⁹ Shifting of the urban environmental discourse in Chennai to the ‘right’ in the post-tsunami and post-2005 floods context is currently being investigated by the researcher. A paper to this effect was presented at the Fifth International Critical Geography Conference held from 3-7 December, 2007 in Mumbai, India.

distributed among participants in a decision-making process, 'it does not follow that the less powerful, the subordinated ones are more recipients, subjects of power being exercised over them: they are also an essential part in the reproduction/diffusion of a given social structure; and for that diffusion to occur, they make use of the existing structure' (Zunino 2006: 1830).

Empirical findings show that the politics of the middle class are provisional, going through a process of negotiation. Middle-class discourses on the beach (*Chapter Six*), show an ensemble of efforts which are not only contested by other social groups at various points of the discourse, but also by their own inability to construct a hermetic claim to propriety. It therefore comes across as being spatio-temporally limited and uneven. It is also obvious is that the middle-class claims are based not on any simplistic manipulation thesis, but through an emphasis of subtly articulated class reproduction practices.

Having said so much, can we further conclude that the middle class in their oscillation between a politics of indifference and a politics of intolerance is currently in a temporal state of bourgeois conditioning, a response to a cumulated period of anger and resentment? And will this soon pass over as they relapse into their earlier state of socio-political absenteeism? Empirical findings show most middle-class claims come across in a fractured form making its stand point messy. As the middle class disseminates mixed messages, they fail to subscribe unanimously and overwhelming to an ideological extreme. Instead, they take a middling position in the debate, and frequently implicate themselves in the blame-game. It seems like the traditional Marxist perception of the middle class emphasising its contradictory (non)location within the class structure, and thereby its paradoxical nature is still relevant. This suggests a class that is not given to handling power, is ill-equipped to lead as a dominant class, and generally makes a hash of things at both ends. Rather, the middle class appears more satisfied with its limited role, bargaining with the state for minor spoils in the form of consumer benefits.

While *Chapter Two* suggests that the new middle class is no longer content with this 'sidelined' role, their inherent paradoxical nature is still prime. This influences the resulting form of citizenship, which is created neither within the spaces of modernity nor that of democracy. Its conceptualisation is thus within an anomalous blueprint, thereby rendering the middle-class practices faulty. Rather than a simple dismissal of their assertions based on the historical argument that the middle class has rarely developed into a sustained and distinct social class, this thesis through a theoretical and empirical engagement with their contemporary discourse shows that the middle-class claims to citizenship is not just steeped in rhetoric but also fundamentally flawed.

Since this thesis is about documenting middle-class voices, it is only appropriate to conclude with a verbatim observation of a middle-class resident who reflected quite pointedly on his class's role play as 'citizen':

It is only posturing. What is happening, this is my observation, middle-class people do not have a say outside their [residential] campus. One thing is, they are busy with their careers and all that. They are always to be under constant pressure, to go up in their careers, manage things, manage stress, [...] their children's education and all, and they have very little time to do any community work for that matter. *I am talking about the typical middle class that has very little time.* Because I know, think of even [...] the maximum they can express is they read newspapers and agree and disagree on such things. Other than this they are not very voicy and they can't go and even if they go and make any political statement they are afraid of their own sense of security....Even if there is an accident happening on the roads you can't find the middle-class people opening their doors and talking the patient to the hospital and all that. More for the fear of losing much of his time there subsequently, than not necessarily not being able to help. He may sympathise, ultimately he may look back what are the consequences – he has to go to the police station, things like that so these things and all that. So they are afraid even to do such things. So they don't have a say outside of the campus. They can't make political statements, they can't collectively go and protest against any injustice and all that. They are more of silent people. Okay. Now what is happening is those aspirations or what they cannot voice in front of their boss or in their office or in office also it becomes more a rat race. They can freely express here. It is only an expression of what they can't do, what they can't voice outside the campus, in a signal either with a police fellow or somebody who is crossing the road in the wrong place or against the political leaders. They like to do *little small politics* here that's all. It is only a satisfying thing like that. (AR-190404-02, emphasis added)

Appendix 1

Some key statistics about Chennai

Statistical information presented in this section complement the discussions in the thesis (*Chapter Four*, in particular) about the regionalism of Chennai (historic and contemporary). Understanding its impact in numeric terms is important to place the global aspirations of the city in 'real' perspective. According to the 2001 Census, Chennai is the fourth largest city and urban agglomeration in India.¹⁸⁰ But even though Tamil Nadu emerges as the most urbanised amongst the large Indian states with 44 percent level of urbanisation, Chennai City's population of 4.3 million constitutes only 15.8 percent of the state's urban population, and the metropolitan area's population of 6.56 million accounts for less than a quarter of the same. In this regard, the draft Second Master Plan prepared by CMDA (2007) notes that Tamil Nadu is one of the few states in India with a hierarchy of urban areas dispersed fairly uniformly throughout the state (Tables 8 and 9).

¹⁸⁰ The Census of India defines an Urban Agglomeration as a continuous urban spread constituting a town and its adjoining urban outgrowths (OGs), or two or more physically contiguous towns together and any adjoining urban outgrowths of such towns.

Table 8: Population of major urban agglomerations

Urban Agglomeration	Population	Percentage Share of State's Urban Population	Percentage Share of State's Total Population
Greater Mumbai	16,434,386	40.00	16.96
Kolkata	13,205,697	58.88	16.47
Delhi	12,877,470	99.78	92.97
Chennai	6,560,242	23.87	10.51
Hyderabad	5,742,036	27.59	7.53
Bangalore	5,701,446	31.74	10.79

Source: Census 2001

Table 9: Urbanisation characteristics of major Indian states

State	No. of UAs	No. of Towns	Urbanisation (%)
Maharashtra	15	378	42.4
Delhi	1	62	93.2
West Bengal	21	375	28.0
Tamil Nadu	27	832	44.0
Andhra Pradesh	37	210	27.3
Karnataka	24	270	34.0

Source: Census 2001

But it is not just in terms of its demography that Chennai's primacy in relationship to its state is less prominent than other cities like Mumbai, but economically as well. Chennai's contribution to the state domestic product is slightly over 10 percent, while cities like Mumbai and Bangalore have a more substantial influence in their state's economy, accounting for a quarter of its net domestic product (Table 10). In 2003-04, Mumbai's share had increased to 35 percent, and Bangalore's net district domestic product comprised 28 percent of the state's total in 2004-05, while Chennai's stagnates at 11 percent (CMDA 2007).¹⁸¹

¹⁸¹ For Mumbai, see <http://www.maharashtra.gov.in>, and for Bangalore, see <http://des.kar.nic.in> Retrieved 04 August, 2008.

Table 10: Net domestic product distribution (1999-00)

	Net Domestic Product; in Rs. millions	Per Capita Net Domestic Product	% Share in State Net Domestic Product
	(At Current Prices)		
Mumbai	542,623	46,573	25.24
Chennai	134,808	31,036	11.10
Bangalore	186,400	29,134	21.71

Source: Statistical hand book of Tamil Nadu 2004; Deshpande and Deshpande (2005); and Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Karnataka (2003)¹⁸²

Another useful comparison between Chennai and other Indian cities is in terms of the area administered by the local bodies (Table 11). While a smaller, central area generally comes under the jurisdiction of the municipal corporation, it is invariably surrounded by a larger metropolitan area overseen by a non-statutory metropolitan development authority (*Chapter Four*). Chennai's Corporation boundary covers a manageable 174 Km², while the metropolitan area is a larger 1,189 Km². The former was last expanded in 1978, and the Chennai Metropolitan Area (CMA) was first drawn in 1967, and has changed little. On the other hand, regional competitors like Hyderabad and Bangalore have expanded their boundaries (both at the municipal and metropolitan level) considerably in recent times, adopting a wider comprehensive approach to developing their city-regions in view of their globalising economy and its spatial needs. Both Hyderabad and Bangalore municipal corporations have nearly quadrupled their area to 778 Km² and 741 Km², from an earlier, more diminutive area of 172 Km² and 226 Km² respectively.

¹⁸² Bangalore statistics downloaded from <http://des.kar.nic.in>. Retrieved 04 August, 2008.

Table 11: Comparative municipal and metropolitan areas

	City Area (Km2)	Metropolitan Area (Km2)
Mumbai	437	4,335
Kolkata	187	1,854
Delhi	1,397	1,483
Chennai	174	1,189
Hyderabad	778	1,905
Bangalore	741	2,191

Source: Compiled from several sources

How regional is Chennai?

The above statistics relate back to the question of how national or regional is Chennai as a metropolitan city, one that was discussed in *Chapter Four*. Regional forces make their claim of a linguistic majority, a point vehemently argued in the three port cities of Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai. Table 12 shows the clear domination of a single regional language in the case of Kolkata and Chennai in the beginning of the 1990s, thereby reinforcing the success of regional (Dravidian) politics. In the case of Mumbai, while the linguistic dominance of the regional language Marathi has decreased, this, ironically has not reinforced the cosmopolitanism of the city but only yielded to parochial regional forces like the Shiv Sena, which have built a reputation of militantly pursuing the interests of the 'local' Marathi population (also discussed in *Chapter Four*).

Table 12: Linguistic regionalism in the three port cities

	Distribution of Mother Tongue (Percentage)	
	1901	1991
Chennai		
Tamil	63	77
Telugu	21	11
Urdu*	—	5
Kolkata		
Bengali	51	64
Hindi	41	21
Urdu*	—	12
Mumbai		
Marathi	53	44
Hindi	15	16
Gujarati	21	14
Urdu*	—	12
* 1901 Census did not recognise Urdu as a language		

Source: Census 1901 and 1991

Another factor that is useful in understanding the regionalism of Chennai is the composition of in-migrants into the city. Census 2001 shows that Chennai has the lowest number of in-migrants amongst the top six urban agglomerations, including Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Hyderabad and Bangalore (Table 13). At less than 500,000, only 6 percent of the population are in-migrants, as against the 2 million plus in Mumbai (15 percent) and Delhi (7 percent) and nearly a million in Kolkata (16 percent) and Bangalore (13 percent). Moreover, 75 percent of the in-migrants are from within the state, second only to Hyderabad, reinforcing yet again the regional nature of Chennai.

Table 13: In-migrants – Last residence 0-9 Years

Urban Agglomeration	Population	In-migrants (Percentage)			Total In-migrants	Percentage of In-migrants to Total Population
		Within the State	Other States	Other Countries		
Greater Mumbai	16,434,386	892,706 (35.86)	1,571,181 (63.11)	25,665 (1.03)	2,489,552	15.1
Kolkata	13,205,697	470,601 (57.20)	297,279 (26.20)	54,509 (6.60)	822,389	16.4
Delhi	12,877,470	77,663 (36.87)	1,988,314 (94.13)	46,386 (2.20)	2,112,363	6.6
Chennai	6,560,242	334,972 (76.99)	91,964 (21.89)	5,684 (1.30)	435,620	6.2
Hyderabad	5,742,036	407,861 (81.82)	88,216 (17.70)	2,406 (0.48)	498,483	8.7
Bangalore	5,701,446	401,932 (52.78)	353,156 (46.38)	6,397 (0.84)	761,485	13.4

Source: Census 2001

It is obvious from the above tables that although Chennai is the fourth largest metropolis in India, its claims of a national profile are compromised by its regional nature. Thus, amongst the six largest cities in India, while Chennai is far behind Mumbai in terms of the socio-economic profile, it also finds itself in danger of being left behind by its regional competitors like Bangalore and Hyderabad which have taken several measures to upgrade to the national and thereby global platform. In this context, it is also useful to take a look at the city's other key statistics, particularly related to infrastructure indicators.

Assessing Chennai's infrastructure

The Chennai Metropolitan Area (CMA) includes the Corporation, eight municipalities, 28 town panchayats, and 10 panchayat unions. CMDA in 2003 announced an ambitious Rs. 18,000 crore investment plan for the metropolitan plan, in an effort to transform it into a 'world-class city' (*Chapter Four*). Spaced over three phases of short, medium and long term, the investment envisaged improvements to traffic and transportation, housing, and essential services of water, sanitation, electricity, storm water drainage, and solid waste management (Table 14).

Table 14: Percentage distribution of CMA Investment Plan

CMA Investment Plan 2003	
Traffic and transportation	57.0
Housing (TNHB)	3.0
Housing (Slums)	4.0
Water supply	13.0
Sewerage	10.0
Storm water drainage	1.0
Solid waste management	0.5
Electricity	11.5
Total	100.0

Source: CMDA 2007

The above table shows that the onus is on traffic and transportation improvement schemes, with *Chapter Four* already establishing that traffic and transportation solutions focus more on the bourgeois demand of the middle and upper class residents of the city, with less focus on a comprehensive strategy that can ease the movement problems of the poor within the city. On the contrary, a comparison of the modal split for the three cities of Chennai, Hyderabad and Bangalore shows that a majority of the commuters still continue to rely on public buses and other cheaper modes of transport including cycling and walking (Table 15).

Table 15: Modal split comparison in percentage

	Chennai	Hyderabad	Bangalore
Private cars	4	11	5
Two wheelers	18	29	30
Train	5	—	—
Bus	29	44	40
Bicycle	13	3	1
Walking	28	—	16
Others	3	13	8

Source: Compiled from CMDA (2007), GHMC City Development Plan (2006) and Bangalore City Development Plan (2006)

A similar concern persists in the related sector of housing. TNHB was inactive from 2001-06, subsequently choosing a public private partnership model, involving private developers. Also, with only 4 percent budget allocation for the activities of the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board within the Rs. 18,000 crore Investment Plan, the poor face being priced out of an increasingly privatising housing market. In this regard, Chennai city's slum population's housing-related crisis will only exasperate. It should be noted that while Census 2001 identifies the slum population in Chennai as 25 percent of the city's total population, this figure increases to 31 percent when viewed in terms of the number of households (Table 16). There are 962,213 households in the city of which 296,012 live in slum conditions.

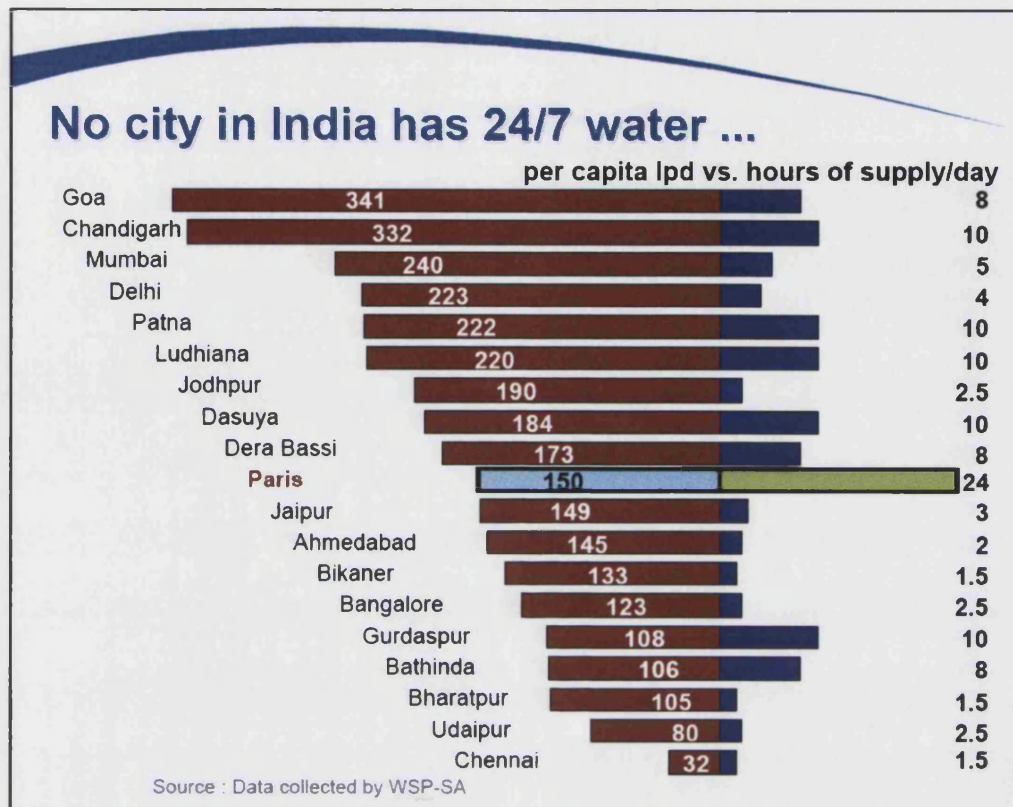
Table 16: Slum population in major Indian cities

Municipal Corporation	Population	Slum Population	Percentage of Slum Population
Greater Mumbai	11,978,450	6,475,440	54.05
Delhi	9,879,172	1,851,231	18.74
Kolkata	4,572,876	1,485,309	32.48
Chennai	4,343,645	1,079,414	24.85
Hyderabad	3,637,483	626,849	17.23
Bangalore	4,301,326	430,501	10.00

Source: Census 2001

While those living in the slums wallow in miserable conditions, far worse than the rest of the city, the city in general suffers from poor infrastructure services. Chennai's persistent water crisis has been addressed in chapters *Four* and *Five*. Although CMDA (2007) claims that nearly 98 percent of the city's population is covered by piped water supply, according to Census 2001 only 45 percent of the households in the city have reported having tap water as source of drinking water. In fact, per capita availability of water (in litres per day – lpd) is one of the lowest amongst Indian cities, 105 lpd, in comparison to 162 lpd in Hyderabad, 147 lpd in Bangalore and 168 lpd in Mumbai (CMDA 2007). During the acute water crisis of 2003-04, supply had drastically reduced to 70 lpd per person (CMDA 2003). A World Bank report by Misra and Eng (2007) alleges that Chennai's water supply is the poorest dipping to 32 lpd per person (Figure 51).

Figure 51: Estimation of water supply in Indian cities



Source: Misra and Eng (2007)

In terms of sewerage, while the Investment Plan for Chennai Metropolitan Area (2003) mentioned that the sewerage system in the city covered 97 percent of the city's population, it acknowledged that in reality only 68 percent of the households had access to the sewerage system. Similarly, in terms of solid waste management, an estimated 3000 tonnes of solid waste are generated within the city area per day (174 Km²), much more than that recorded by the Municipal Corporation of Hyderabad (2240 tonnes/day; 172 Km²) or the Bangalore Mahanagara Palike (1742 tonnes/day; 226 Km²) (Table 17). Moreover, in Chennai, solid waste is disposed of at two designated landfill sites in the city with no official policy of recycling or source segregation. Whereas, Hyderabad and Bangalore have already set up processing plants to treat the waste before being disposed, and encourage vermin-composting on a smaller scale. Apart from the above infrastructure concerns, there is also the

issue of land use transformation in the past few decades, highlighting the pressures of hyper-urbanisation of the city.

Table 17: Solid waste generation in three Indian cities

	Chennai	Hyderabad	Bangalore
City area (Km ²)	174	172	226
Solid waste/day (in Tonnes)	3000	2240	1742
Per capita solid waste (grams/day)	690 ¹⁸³	615	405

Source: CMDA (2007); GHMC City Development Plan (2006); and Bangalore City Development Plan (2006)

Analysing the evolution of Chennai's land use pattern

As Table 18 indicates, the predominance of residential use (50 percent) explains to a large extent the inclination of developers to concentrate on residential developments within the city. Moreover, while at the all-India level, 67 percent of urban households are owned (Census 2001), in Chennai, only 40 percent are ownership-based (CMDA 2003). There is a strong demand amongst the residents for home ownership, resulting in the hyper-active residential real estate development, and which ironically shrinks the amount of land allocated for dedicated open spaces and recreation. The draft Second Master Plan (CMDA 2007) shows that of the total 1543 land use reclassification requests filed between 1977 and 2005, 102 were for reclassification of open space and recreation sites into other uses, of which 49 were for residential redevelopment (48 percent), whereas only 16 were reclassified as open space and recreational use in return. While one would expect that home ownership status will make a resident demand better amenities of his environment including parks and play areas, the last thirty years to the contrary have witnessed a drastic reduction in the open spaces by more than half (from 5.25 percent to 2.09 percent). This is a

¹⁸³ CMDA (2007) claims that 585 grams per capita per day of solid waste are generated in the Chennai city area. But if you assume their estimate of 3000 tonnes per day and a city population of 4,343,645 million, then it works out to be 690 grams per capita per day.

dismal figure compared to Bangalore which registers nine percent of its total land as public open spaces (Westfall and de Villa 2001).

Table 18: Evolution of land use distribution in Chennai City

Land Use Pattern in Chennai City (Percentage)			
	1973	2001	2006
Residential	44.46	52.94	54.25
Commercial	4.68	7.05	7.09
Industrial	5.10	5.07	5.17
Institutional	17.38	18.11	18.48
Open Space and Recreational	5.25	2.07	2.09
Agriculture	—	0.53	0.57
Non Urban	—	0.47	0.47
Others	23.13	13.75	11.89

Source: CMDA 2007

Appendix 2

Interview schedule

Table 19: List of experts/key informants interviewed

Experts			
	Name	Organisation	Interview date
1	V Nagarajan	Editor, A Guide to Chennai Real Estate	20/10/2003
2	Santhanam	Chief Planner, Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority (CMDA)	20/10/2003
3	G Dattadri	Retired Planner, Department of Town Planning	Several
4	M Anantharanjan Doss	Retired Planner, CMDA	Several
5	C Chandramouli	Census Operations, Tamil Nadu	04/11/2003
6	CH Gopinatha Rao	Planning Consultant	09/12/2003
7	P Somnath	Tamil Nadu Housing Board (TNHB)	08/12/2003
8	Tara Murali	Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH)	28/01/2004
9	A Srivathsan/S Ravi	School of Architecture and Planning, Anna University	04/02/2004
10	Prof. MA Kalam	Department of Anthropology, University of Madras	06/02/2004
11	Prof. T Vasantha Kumar	Department of Geography, University of Madras	18/02/2004
12	Vijay Mehta	Chennai Traffic Task Force	10/03/2004
13	CS Raman	Chennai Traffic Task Force - Thiruvanniyur	25/03/2004
14	Louis Meneses	Retired IAS Officer	02/04/2004
15	Theodore Baskaran	Naturalist/Historian	09/04/2004
16	MB Nirmal	President, Exnora	31/08/2004
17	Bharat Jayaraj	Consumer Action Group	03/09/2004
18	TK Ramkumar	Exnora Official	03/09/2004
19	GUG Sastry	Joint Commissioner Police - Traffic	10/09/2004
20	Prof. Champakalakshmi	Historian	15/09/2004

Table 20: List of property developers and agents interviewed

Property Developers			
	Name	Company	Interview Date
1	Sumanth	Sumanth Builders	21/10/2003
2	Ravi Appaswamy	Appaswamy Builders	01/11/2003
3	Kumar	Naveen Builders	04/11/2003
4	Mehul Doshi	Doshi	25/11/2003
5	Vijay	Jain Housing	10/12/2003
6	Jamal Deen	Jamals Enterprises	10/12/2003
7	Kalyanaraman	Khivraj Estates	16/12/2003
8	Navratan Lunawath	Arihant	19/12/2003
9	Subba Reddy	Ceebros	21/12/2003
10	TA Ramachandran	Ashok Leyland	22/12/2003
11	Nirmala Rajan	Chaitanya	30/12/2003
12	Suresh V Nath	Ramaniyam	05/03/2004
13	Ravi	DBS Lancor	06/03/2004
Property Agents			
1	CB Richard Ellis		13/10/2003
2	Colliers International		20/11/2003
3	Chesterton Meghraj		11/12/2003
4	Hanu Reddy Realtors		14/12/2003

Table 21: List of journalists interviewed

Journalists			
	Name	Company	Interview Date
1	V Nagarajan	A Guide to Chennai Real Estate	20/10/2003
1	Senthil Kumar	The Economic Times	11/12/2003
2	Lata Amarnath/Swati	The Hindu	02/01/2004
3	Vincent de Silva	Mylapore Times	28/01/2004
4	Vidya	Arcot Road Times	17/02/2004
5	SP Ambrose	Adayar Times	03/03/2004
6	S Ramakrishnan	Anna Nagar Times	18/03/2004

Table 22: List of residents interviewed

Interview No.	Name	Development/Neighbourhood	Area	Interview Date	Interview Type	Taped/Transcribed	Code	Gender	Age
1	Gopalan	Ceebros Keshavapuramajuram	Other	03/02/2004	Individual	Yes/No	MSC-030204-01	M	±60
2	Srinivas	Puduvellam/Vaimiki Nagar	ECR	10/02/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	ECR-100204-01	M	±40
3	Jaikumar	Siddharth Heights	Arcof Road	15/02/2004	Group	Field notes	AR-150204-01	M	±40
4	Muralidharan	Siddharth Heights						M	±40
5	Ganesan	Arcof Terrace/Appaswamy	Arcof Road	16/02/2004	Individual	Field notes	AR-160204-01	M	±50
6	Sangeetha Venkatesh	Alacinity Mohana	Arcof Road	17/02/2004	Individual	Field notes	AR-170204-01	F	±35
7	Ashokan	Doshi Gardens	Arcof Road	22/02/2004	Group	Field notes	AR-220204-01	M	±40
8	Ramanathan	Doshi Gardens						M	±50
9	Asha	Doshi Gardens	Arcof Road	22/02/2004	Individual	Yes/No	AR-220204-02	F	±35
10	Ravi Subramanian	Ceebros Gardens	Arcof Road	22/02/2004	Group	Yes/No	AR-220304-03	M	±35
11	Vivekanandan	Ceebros Gardens						M	±35
12	Radhakrishnan	Ceebros Gardens						M	±60
13	Narayanan	Ceebros Gardens						M	±35
14	Rajaratnam	TNHB/Vaimiki Nagar	ECR	28/02/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	ECR-280304-01	M	±40
15	Akila Mahalingam	Doshi Gardens	Arcof Road	29/02/2004	Couple	Yes/Yes	AR-290204-01	F	±35
16	Jayapalan Rajagopal	Doshi Gardens	Arcof Road	29/02/2004	Individual	Yes/No	AR-290204-02	M	±60
17	P Radhakrishnan	Ceebros Gardens	Arcof Road	29/02/2004	Individual	Yes/No	AR-290204-03	M	±60
18	Balasubramanian	Vaimiki Nagar	ECR	01/03/2004	Individual	Yes/No	ECR-010304-01	M	±60
19	Suresh	Neelengarai	ECR	04/03/2004	Individual	Field notes	ECR-040304-01	M	±40
20	Vairasekhar	KK Nagar Federation	Arcof Road	04/03/2004	Group	Field notes	ECR-040304-02	M	±40
21	Elango	KK Nagar Federation						M	±40
22	Rajamani	KK Nagar Federation						M	±40
23	Vasumathi Rajagopal	Doshi Gardens	Arcof Road	05/03/2004	Individual	Field notes	AR-050304-01	F	±40
24	Narayanan	Vijayashanthi	Arcof Road	06/03/2004	Individual	Field notes	AR-060304-01	M	±40
25	Puneeta	Sai Nagar Women's Civic Exnora	Arcof Road	06/03/2004	Group	Field notes	AR-060304-02	F	±40
26	Vimala Rao	Sai Nagar Women's Civic Exnora						F	±40
27	Shyamala Ramamurthy	Sai Nagar Women's Civic Exnora						F	±40
28	Usha	Sai Nagar Women's Civic Exnora						F	±40
29	Sundari Srinivasan	Sai Nagar Women's Civic Exnora						F	±40
30	AGM	KK Nagar Federation	Arcof Road	07/03/2004	Participant Observation	Field notes			
31	Kalyan Krishnan	KK Nagar Federation	Arcof Road	07/03/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	AR-070304-01	M	±50
32	Kasimnathan	Rani Anna Nagar/KK Nagar Federation	Arcof Road	07/03/2004	Group	Yes/Yes	AR-070304-02	M	±50
33	Kalisesundaram	Rani Anna Nagar/KK Nagar Federation						M	±40
34	Vedanaayakam	Rani Anna Nagar/KK Nagar Federation						M	±40
35	EGM	Ceebros Gardens	Arcof Road	07/03/2004	Participant Observation	Field notes			
36	Shankaraman	Ceebros Gardens	Arcof Road	07/03/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	AR-070304-03	M	±35
37	Chitra Sastry	Lakshmi Maa/Vaimiki Nagar	ECR	07/03/2004	Couple	Yes/Yes	ECR-070304-04	F	±35
38	Mahendran	Majestic	Arcof Road	08/03/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	AR-080304-01	M	±40
39	Madhan Raj	Shivani	ECR	09/03/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	ECR-090304-01	M	±35
40	Sankar Raman	Lakshmi Maa/Vaimiki Nagar	ECR	10/03/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	ECR-100304-01	M	±40
41	Nagarajan	Keshav Dugar/Keshavapuramajuram	Other	11/03/2004	Individual	Yes/No	MISC-110304-01	M	±60
42	Shiva Sankar	Vaimiki Nagar	ECR	12/03/2004	Individual	Field notes	ECR-120304-01	M	±40
43	Thimelai Naidu	Premier Ghislaam	Arcof Road	13/03/2004	Individual	Field notes	AR-130304-01	F	±35
44	Umasankar	Abhishek	ECR	14/03/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	ECR-140304-01	M	±35
45	Sankarvadivelu	Shivani	ECR	14/03/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	ECR-140304-02	M	±40
46	Anusha Sundarajan	Salma's Royal Residency	Arcof Road	14/03/2004	Group	Yes/Yes	AR-140304-03	F	±35
47	Uma Chandrasekhar	Salma's Royal Residency						F	±35
48	Banu Murali	Salma's Royal Residency						F	±35
49	Revathy Raghuraman	Salma's Royal Residency						F	±35
50	Mythili Rajagopalan	Salma's Royal Residency						F	±60
51	Chitra Sekhar	Salma's Royal Residency						F	±40
52	Gomathi Venkatraman	Salma's Royal Residency						F	±40
53	Ramanathan	Vaimiki Nagar	ECR	15/03/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	ECR-150304-01	M	±60
54	Rajagopal	TNHB/Vaimiki Nagar	ECR	15/03/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	ECR-150304-02	M	±40
55	Balagopal	Manasarovar/Vaimiki Nagar	ECR	17/03/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	ECR-170304-01	M	±60
56	Murali Mohan	Doshi Gardens	Arcof Road	19/03/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	AR-190304-01	M	±60
57	Narayanan	Ceebros Gardens	Arcof Road	19/03/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	AR-190304-02	M	±35
58	Jaya Rajagopal	Kapaleeshwarar Nagar/Neelengarai	ECR	19/03/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	AR-190304-03	F	±40
59	Muralikrishnan	Manasarovar/Vaimiki Nagar	ECR	20/03/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	ECR-200304-01	M	±35
60	Jayaprakash	Chinna Neelengarai Kuppam	ECR	20/03/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	ECR-200304-02	M	±40
61	Prema	Chinna Neelengarai Kuppam	ECR			Yes/Yes	ECR-200304-03	F	±40
62	Express Exnora Civic Forum	Anna Nagar	Arcof Road	20/03/2004	Participant Observation	Field notes			
63	Sripathy	Kapaleeshwarar Nagar/Neelengarai	ECR	21/03/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	ECR-210304-01	M	±60
64	Raghuraman	Abhishek	ECR	21/03/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	ECR-210304-02	M	±35
65	Rukmani Ramani	Shivani	ECR	24/03/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	ECR-240304-01	F	±40
66	Krishna Prasad	Vaimiki Nagar	ECR	25/03/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	ECR-250304-01	M	±50
67	Sindhar	Manasarovar/Vaimiki Nagar	ECR	25/03/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	ECR-250304-02	M	±40
68	VR Menon	Vaimiki Nagar	ECR	25/03/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	ECR-250304-03	M	±60
69	Raghavan	Friends of the beach/Neelengarai	ECR	27/03/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	ECR-270304-01	M	±50
70	Thiagarajan	Kazura Gardens	ECR	27/03/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	ECR-270304-02	M	±40
71	Aruna	Beach Buddies/Vaimiki Nagar	ECR	27/03/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	ECR-270304-03	F	±35
72	Vivekanandan	Ceebros Gardens	Arcof Road	28/03/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	AR-280304-01	M	±35
73	Gem Marie	Journalist Colony	ECR	30/03/2004	Individual	Field notes	ECR-300304-01	F	±35
74	Aarth Abraham	Beach Buddies/Vaimiki Nagar	ECR	30/03/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	ECR-300304-02	F	±35
75	Srinivas	Vaimiki Nagar	ECR	30/03/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	ECR-300304-03	M	±40
76	Murali Padmanabhan	Manasarovar/Vaimiki Nagar	ECR	31/03/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	ECR-310304-01	M	±40
77	Arokia Das	Vaimiki Nagar	ECR	31/03/2004	Couple	Field notes	ECR-310304-02	M	±40
78	Srinath Purohit	Manasarovar/Vaimiki Nagar	ECR	01/04/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	ECR-010404-01	F	±35
79	Bhavani	Puduvellam/Vaimiki Nagar	ECR	01/04/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	ECR-010404-02	F	±35
80	Parthasarathy	Kottivakkam Beach Walkers	ECR	01/04/2004	Group	Yes/Yes	ECR-010404-03	M	±60
81	Kalyan	Kottivakkam Beach Walkers						M	±40
82	Chandrasekhar	Kottivakkam Beach Walkers						M	±40
83	Mani	Kottivakkam Beach Walkers						M	±60
84	Nitya Balaji	Vaimiki Nagar	ECR	01/04/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	ECR-010404-04	F	±40
85	Ramaswamy	Journalist Colony	ECR	02/04/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	ECR-020404-01	M	±40
86	Sujatha Kundra	Vaimiki Nagar	ECR	02/04/2004	Individual	Yes/No	ECR-020404-02	F	±35
87	Nurulah	Journalist Colony	ECR	03/04/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	ECR-030404-01	M	±40
88	Sabiba Vufukun	Vaimiki Nagar	ECR	03/04/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	ECR-030404-02	M	±35
89	Annu	Sunrise Avenue/Neelengarai	ECR	03/04/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	ECR-030404-03	F	±40
90	Anandachari	East Coast Beach Walkers' Assoc.	ECR	04/04/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	ECR-040404-01	M	±40
91	Bhuvana Ramanan	Vaimiki Nagar	ECR	06/04/2004	Individual	Yes/No	ECR-060404-01	F	±35
92	Govindaswamy	Federation of Welfare Assoc. of ECR	ECR	07/04/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	ECR-070404-01	M	±40
93	Rajan	Ceebros Gardens	Arcof Road	07/04/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	AR-070404-02	M	±35
94	Mark Fernandes	Bella Vista/Neelengarai Beach Forum	ECR	09/04/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	ECR-090404-01	M	±40
95	Ratnavelu	Thiruvanniyur Kuppam	ECR	09/04/2004	Group	Yes/Yes	ECR-090404-02	M	±40
96	Vimal Kumar	Thiruvanniyur Kuppam						M	±40
97	Krishnan	Thiruvanniyur Kuppam						M	±40
98	Jayabalan	Thiruvanniyur Kuppam						M	±50
99	Pakkir	Thiruvanniyur Kuppam						M	±50
100	Belaji	Ceebros Gardens	Arcof Road	11/04/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	AR-110404-01	M	±40
101	Vij Krishnan	Ceebros Gardens	Arcof Road	11/04/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	AR-110404-02	M	±35
102	Ramanathan	Neelengarai Beach Forum	ECR	15/04/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	ECR-150404-01	M	±50
103	Gnan	Journalist Colony	ECR	15/04/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	ECR-150404-02	M	±40
104	Subramanian & Srilatha	Shivani	ECR	01/09/2004	Couple	Yes/Yes	ECR-010904-01	M	±35
105	Divya & Suresh Krishnamurthy	Shivani	ECR	01/09/2004	Couple	Yes/No	ECR-010904-02	M	±35
106	Ramaswamy	Shivani	ECR	02/09/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	ECR-020904-01	M	±60
107	Kamala Ramakrishnan	Shivani	ECR	02/09/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	ECR-020904-02	F	±60
108	Theagarajan	Shivani	ECR	04/09/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	ECR-040904-01	M	±40
109	Purusotham	Thiruvalluvar Nagar	ECR	04/09/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	ECR-040904-02	M	±40
110	Elke & Juergen	Besant Nagar	ECR	04/09/2004	Couple	Yes/Yes	ECR-040904-03	M	±40
111	Sundaram	AGS Colony, Kottivakkam	ECR	08/09/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	ECR-080904-01	M	±40
112	Sambamurthy	Manasarovar/Vaimiki Nagar	ECR	10/09/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	ECR-100904-01	M	±60
113	Raj Gupta	Casuarina Drive/Neelengarai	ECR	12/09/2004	Individual	Yes/Yes	ECR-120904-01	M	±60

Figure 52: Location of participating residential developments on Arcot Road



Figure 53: Location of participating residential developments on ECR



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